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["DO YOU THINK YOU COULD EVER LEARN TO LOVE ME?" SAID THE RECTOR, GENTLY, AS HE BENT OVER HER.]

NAMELESS.

CHAPTER VII.

THE next day Lilian spent entirely in her lonely attic. She had a strange confidence that Miss Ainslie's recommendation would be effectual. It seemed doubting her friend in need to seek after other engagements until she heard the result of the letter to Lady Dacres, and some instinct, which she could not have explained, made the lonely girl shun the confectioner's where she had met her knight. It would seem, she thought, in her maidenly modesty, like trying to foist herself upon his notice to go there again.

She watched anxiously for the post on Saturday morning, the third day after her visit to Leckenham, but no letter came for her. She thought, with a sigh, that if she did not hear from Miss Ainslie by Monday she must recommence her weary search for employment; and as she sat, half-perished with the cold, in her humble room, sewing away industriously, her hopes were not so bright as they had been the day before.

She was weary of work—plain sewing is infinitely dreary when one has no pleasant theme for thought. She was wondering, with a vague yearning, how long Earlsmere would be without a master, when a knock came at the door—a determined rap, as though the person from whose knuckles it emanated much objected to be kept waiting.

Lilian's first thought was the post. It was barely ten, but she had no precise idea of the time of the second delivery. She sprang to the door and threw it open, but she did not find Mrs. Matthew's buxom figure with the talisman in her hand, but the slight, trim-looking mistress of Rose Bank, very comfortably dressed in a winter costume, trimmed with fur.

She said nothing of the steep ascent, she never remarked upon the lack of fire, or the blue tint of Lilian's fingers; she took a seat upon the foot of the bed, which, seeing there was no second chair, was prudent, and remarked, calmly,—

"You see I have come to return your visit, Miss Green."

"It is very kind of you."

"Saturday is my holiday, and I often come up to town. Well, I expect you are wondering what news I have for you?"

A bright colour came into the girl's pale cheeks.

"Oh! have you really heard?"

"Really. I might have posted a letter to you last night, but as I was coming to town I preferred to call. Well, the thing is settled; Lady Dacres declares herself quite satisfied, and will expect you as soon as you can go."

Lilian threw herself on the ground, and, with pretty, foreign grace, kissed Miss Ainslie's hand.

The latter drew it away.

"I'm not the Queen, child! Don't treat me like royalty. Well, how soon can you be ready? I hope you will be pretty comfortable there. If you like children you may get on, for I have heard the little Dacres are remarkably pretty—though spoilt, of course."

Her eyes travelled round the room; she saw the extent of Lilian's wardrobe, for there was no chest of drawers, and the small portmanteau was the only receptacle for clothes. She took in the state of the case at a glance.

"I think you had better come out with me and do some shopping, Miss Green."

The girl's blue eyes met hers doubtfully.

"I will see to that. What's the use of being an old maid with a few savings if one cannot help other people? Lady Dacres offers a hundred a-year, so you can pay me back out of your salary. Tut!" as Lilian began to protest; "I shall not be trusting you a bit longer than I trust the parents of my pupils."

Under Miss Ainslie's judicious directions ten pounds were made to go further than ten pounds have ever gone before; then she conducted her companion to a restaurant—not *the* one—and made her eat a very good dinner. She then announced she must go home.

"Will you write to Lady Dacres and name the day for your arrival? I should make it Monday week, I think; you would hardly be ready before."

"I will write. Oh! Miss Ainslie, how am I to thank you?"

"Don't try. Then you will go down by the twelve o'clock train from Paddington. I hope you will get on comfortably; and, Miss Green, —have you any money?"

The question was abrupt, but poor Miss Ainslie had tried in vain to introduce it gradually. She was probably prepared for the answer, for she slipped a small purse into Lilian's hand.

"You can't go about without a shilling in your pocket!" she said, when the girl remonstrated; "and, as I said before, you can pay it back out of your first quarter's salary. Well, good-bye! Remember, we trust you."

And the stress on those three words was the only exhortation which she bestowed upon her *protégée*.

It seemed to Lilian fortune had at last smiled on her again: she was once more to be an inmate of an easeful home—once more to enjoy the comforts to which gentlewomen are accustomed. She certainly had heard very little of her employer, and still less of the duties required of her, but if will and effort could fulfil these they should not go undone; and in her gratitude she could hardly resist adding a promise to this effect to the little note in which she informed Lady Dacres of the date of her arrival.

A very busy week followed, Lilian's needle worked incessantly; and so time flew by until at last the morning came which was to launch her on her new life, and, punctually at half-past eleven, Lady Dacres' governess reached Paddington station.

Early as it was someone was there before her. When her cab stopped Guy Ainslie was waiting to hand her out. It was he who directed the porters where to take her luggage, and who seemed as if he had come there on purpose to take all care and trouble off her hands.

"Miss Green," he said, with the strange abruptness which he and his sister both possessed so strongly; "I want to speak to you. Your things will be quite safe; I have told the man to secure a seat for you as soon as the train comes up. Will you take a turn with me away from all this crowd?"

Wonderingly, Lilian obeyed him. Firstly, he was not a man whom any woman would readily have disobeyed; secondly, she owed him too much to cross his wishes.

But for some seconds he did not speak, he seemed to have a great difficulty in beginning what he had to say. At last, he asked,—

"What has my sister told you about Lady Dacres?"

Lilian might have answered "Very little," but she merely said Miss Ainslie had spoken of Lady Dacres as an old pupil.

"Ah!"

"She said the children were pretty."

"If your life is spent with them in the schoolroom you may be comfortable," he said, slowly; "but I told Kate Dacres Castle was the last place in the world for you—only she would not see it."

A faint flush coloured the girl's face.

"You think I am not good enough; but, indeed, I will try my best."

"I never said you were not good enough. Life is a very tangled web indeed at Dacres Castle, and I think it would be difficult even for a woman of the world to steer her way clearly, let alone a child like you."

It was a strange speech.

"I am older than I look; I am nearly nineteen!"

He smiled.

"Are you? That is not very old, Miss Green."

"And I shall be getting older every day."

"Older and more worldly wise."

"Does it take much worldly wisdom to teach two little girls?"

"Yes, if they are ever to become fashionable young ladies!" cried Guy Ainslie, bitterly.

She looked at him in surprise.

"Forgive me,"—gazing into her deep blue eyes—"I did not mean to frighten you. In fact, I came here to try and give you some good advice; only I don't seem doing it. You see," abruptly, "it may not be quite in my line to advise a young lady, only I feel somehow as though you were under my care. It is a strange fancy, isn't it?"

"Very; but I shall be very grateful for your advice."

"Then listen. Never wax confidential with Lady Dacres—never tell her your troubles, and never listen to hers."

"Has she troubles?"

"Never mind that! Well, where was I? Oh! I remember. Do not mention our names, and never let Sir John know at whose recommendation you came to the Castle. It won't be a passport to his favour."

The train was up now; the warning bell had rung. Lilian remembered suddenly she had no ticket; Mr. Ainslie laughed as she mentioned it.

"I got that long ago!"

He led the way and showed her her umbrella, bag, and other small possessions, carefully stowed away in the corner of a first-class carriage. He handed her in, and then stood with raised hat as the train bore her rapidly from his sight.

It was a long journey and a tedious one. I appeal to anyone who has ever made the trip from Paddington to Chepstow if it be not a wearying one. At this time, being winter, Lilian was robbed of the pleasures of scenery she might have enjoyed.

The beauty of the foliage, the lovely tints of the green, which make the glory of our West of England in summer time, were all absent now. It looked cold and desolate; and the girl, who from her foreign training was peculiarly alive to external things, turned from the window and tried to busy herself with the book Guy Ainslie had placed in her hands. But whoever could read with any enjoyment at the very threshold of a new life? No one surely who was young and imaginative!

Lilian felt perplexed by Mr. Ainslie's warning. She could not make out the exact relations between Lady Dacres and the household at Rose Bank. If she had simply been his sister's pupil, what could Guy have known of her?

There were nearly twenty years between him and his sister, so that the fact of Lady Dacres's being the latter's pupil did not make her out particularly young. Besides, she could not be if she had children of twelve and thirteen. Then why should Sir John object to his wife's old friend?

It was all bewildering, and Lilian gave a sigh of relief when, soon after five o'clock, the train stopped at Chepstow station, and she descended from the carriage feeling the first stage of her long journey was really over.

A tall footman accosted her.

"Are you the lady for Dacres Castle, ma'am?"

Lilian confessed that she was. It was like a breath of the old life when she found herself seated in a luxurious brougham, while two noble horses bore her quickly over the seven miles which separated the Castle from the dull, sleepy, little town of Chepstow.

The drive was very quick, almost before six the carriage had turned in at the lodge gates, and was dashing up the avenue. It was strange to enter such a house alone. A crowd of servants were in the hall; but oh! how different was everything to when at Lord Earl's side she had first entered Earlesmere. Here, no one welcomed her; no one addressed her. It was only when she stood half irresolute, not knowing which way to turn, that an under maid-servant appeared from some distant regions, and proceeded to show her upstairs.

The girl led the way to a pleasant, well-furnished chamber, hung with chintz; a bright fire blazed in the grate, and wax candles burned on the dressing-table. Evidently the discomforts of which she had been warned would not arise from lack of provision for her creature well-being. Her boxes stood at the foot of the bed, and the little maid volunteered her services in unpacking them.

"The housekeeper thought you would like your tea here to-night, ma'am; the young ladies have had theirs."

Lilian felt she would have postponed tea for the sake of seeing the children with whom her life was to be spent, but she did not propose it. She directed Mary's cares for her comfort, smoothed her bright hair, and sat down to tea with more appetite than she had felt for a long time.

Only when the girl appeared to remove the tray did she inquire the way to the schoolroom, and was ushered down a long corridor to an apartment which seemed quite isolated from the rest of the house. She pushed the door open and went in; two small, white-robed girls stood by the fire; they both looked up in surprise."

"You are not our governess?"

"Yes," said Lilian, quietly. "Why do you think I am not?"

The elder girl blushed and turned away, but the younger said, frankly,—

"You don't look old a bit! All our governesses wear spectacles, and don't have any hair!"

Lilian attempted to suggest spectacles and baldness were not indispensable to the art of tuition.

The children looked at her wistfully.

"I think you'll be nice," said Daisy, at last, putting out one small hand. "Shall you like us?"

"Very much, if you will let me."

"No one like us," said Pansy, disconsolately. "You see, Miss Green, we're not boys!" This fact was indisputable. "And papa hates girls?"

"Not really," said Lilian, gently. "Your papa must love you very much, dears."

"She won't let him."

"Who?"

"Mamma."

Lilian felt as if she was in an atmosphere of mystery. What could it mean? The statements were not like the confidential outpourings of children in momentary vexation; they were more like a clear declaration of facts —of something that everyone knew and they were getting quite used to. At all risks she changed the conversation, and the strange little sisters had begun to chatter quite cheerfully to her, before a very grand nurse appeared and announced that it was their bedtime.

Left alone, the governess sat by the fire pondering a little on her new surroundings, when the door softly opened, and there stood before her what seemed a perfect vision of loveliness.

It was a girl about her own age, although she looked older—a daughter of the gods, so far as stature went; divinely tall, her figure of that wonderful, voluptuous beauty so rare and so attractive; her hair was black as the raven's wing; her eyes were large and lustrous, their colour varying from violet to black, according to the mood which influenced her. She was a complete contrast to Lilian. Both were beauti-

ful; but the delicate grace and loveliness of the governess almost paled before the bewitching, sensuous beauty of her companion.

And their dress, too, was different. Lilian wore a plain, soft, black cashmere, its only relief, white frills at her neck and wrists. The other was in white; long cloud-like draperies of white silk, looped here and there with bright pomegranate blossoms; jewels flashed on her white throat and rounded arms. She came up to Lilian's side with outstretched hand.

"I hope you are not very tired, Miss Green?"

Lilian took the hand, and made some courteous reply; the stranger drew up a low lounging chair and seated herself in it.

"Sir John has gone to sleep, and I am all alone. Have you made acquaintance with my daughters? Don't look surprised; didn't Kate Ainslie tell you I had the misery of being a stepmother?"

It was a revelation to Lilian; this beauteous vision was really the person she had been warned to mistrust. She was ready to accept Guy Ainslie's verdict in most things, but even at his bidding she could not think harshly of her lovely employer.

"I beg your pardon, Lady Dacres. I had no idea."

"Ah! Kate is prudence itself. I daresay she never told you that I used to live at Beckenham, that until six months ago it was my home?"

"Miss Ainslie never told me that."

"And you know them well?" not waiting for an answer. "You have been to Rose Bank; how is the dear old place looking?"

"I was there not a fortnight ago; it looked a happy home."

To her distress Lady Dacres sighed heavily as she answered,—

"It was that always. Ah! always. Oh! those were happy years I spent there, very happy. Kate was a little hard on me sometimes, but she has a heart of gold."

"I am sure she has."

"Do you know her well?" sharply.

"She has been very kind to me."

"Ah!"

A long silence. Lady Dacres sat looking into the fire, at last she asked,—

"And Kate never told you really that I was her cousin?"

"No."

Silence; then she added,—

"Perhaps she's ashamed of the connection."

"Have you known her long, Miss Green?"

"Not very long."

"It can't be very long. I have only been away six months, and I am sure I never heard your name."

"It is not six months yet since I returned to England," said Lilian, slowly.

"It does not take Kate Ainslie long to know people; she decides at once," meditatingly, "and she always keeps to her first judgment. Now, she always detested Sir John; don't look so distressed, Miss Green."

Lilian had to change the conversation by asking some question about the children.

"Oh! do what you like, I shall not interfere. I only want them kept out of my way."

A silence long and deep, so long that poor Lilian felt she was positively rude in not breaking it, only she could think of nothing to say. At last Lady Dacres turned suddenly towards her, and mentioned a subject which was to be a vexed one between them for ever.

"Of course you have seen Guy Ainslie. What do you think of him?"

CHAPTER VIII.

But Lilian Green, to call her by the name which she had adopted, felt a strange confusion as Lady Dacres asked her opinion of Guy Ainslie. Somehow, even without his own words of warning, she would have hesitated to tell her sad history to this beautiful, imperious creature, whose loveliness had no touch of sadness, whose dark eyes seemed ready to read her through and through. How could she say to Lady Dacres, "I think Mr. Ainslie generous and noble," when she must not allege the reason for this opinion.

"Haven't you made up your mind?" asked my lady, good-naturedly; "really Miss Green, you must have been very unobservant; my cousin Guy is the handsomest man you would meet with in a day's journey."

"Is he!" asked Lilian, absently; "you see I have only seen him twice."

"Poor old Guy," reflectively; "how he used to lecture me when I lived at Rose Bank—how long ago it seems."

The governess did not think herself called upon to make any reply to this, as it was murmured very softly, almost as though meant only for the speaker's own ear. She waited a moment, and then again asked Lady Dacres her wishes respecting the children.

"I'm sure I don't know," said my lady, with a yawn, "so that you keep them out of my sight I don't much mind, only you must manage them yourself, and not come to me with any little worries. Why I sent to Kate to recommend me a governess was that those I chose myself were such utter failures. If you justify my cousin's opinion, Miss Green, you will have an easy time of it. I perfectly detest children; I'm sure I was never meant for a stepmother."

The days passed on, Christmas came with its sad memories; the new year dawned, and Lilian seemed to have settled down as a regular inmate of Castle Dacre. As its mistress had promised, she never interfered. Daisy and Pansy were left entirely to the care of their governess, and the two little maidens loved her with all their hearts, their artless affection, their winning ways, helping to soothe the heavy sorrow that had crept over Lilian's life.

When she had been three months at the Castle, and Sir John wrote her a cheque at his lady's request, she had the pleasure of sending back the money Kate Ainslie had lent her, she could not resist writing a few lines to tell of her gratitude for all the kindness shown her by the mistress of Rose Bank.

The reply was prompt, and it came from Guy, not from his sister—a simple kindly letter such as any gentleman might have sent to his sister's friend without wronging his wife or *fiancée* had he chanced to possess one, but yet that letter was the first breeze which stirred the tranquillity of Lilian's life at Dacre Castle.

The evening after she received it Lady Dacres entered the school-room. She was dressed as splendidly as when Lilian first beheld her; but the three months had wrought their changes. Now it was impossible for a keen observer to look at Lady Dacres and not see that she was unhappy—that all her luxuries, all her wealth, her husband's doting love even could not satisfy her heart or fill the void in her life.

She had never been unkind to Lilian; she had never cast petty slights upon her governess. At first even she had been disposed to confide in the girl recommended to her by her cousin; but Lilian did not respond to her advances, and so their intercourse had grown of a very formal and stately nature, only the haughty beauty never forgot that Miss Green was a lady, and invariably treated her as such. But to-night all was changed. No sooner had the children gone to bed than my lady entered, anger written on every feature of her lovely face, her cheeks white with rage, her eyes gleaming with scorn.

"I wonder you are not ashamed to look at me, Miss Green," she began, excitedly; "perhaps you thought, as I left the matter until the children were gone, I meant to look over your deceit. If so, you were bitterly mistaken."

Lilian rose and looked full into the speaker's face. She never quailed before the glance of those angry eyes; she stood there calm and collected in her innocence, looking, despite her simple attire, despite her namelessness, to the full, as beautiful and as high born as my Lady Dacres.

"I have never deceived you, my lady."

Lady Dacres flashed one look of scorn at her.

"I hate lies."

"And I have told you none."

"I prefer the evidence of my own senses."

"Lady Dacres," said Lilian, with simple dignity, "the meanest criminal on Heaven's earth is allowed to know the charge brought against him. Surely you will tell me in what I have failed in my duty to your step-children since the day I entered your house?"

My lady looked surprised.

"Sit down," she said, imperatively.

"I would rather stand. Will you tell me the cause of my offence? In what have I deceived you?"

"The first night you came here you told me you had only seen my cousin twice."

"I never saw Miss Ainslie but twice in my life. Will you appeal to her, Lady Dacres, if you doubt my word?"

"I should not care if you had seen Kate two hundred times!" returned Lady Dacres. "I am not alluding to her."

"To whom, then?"

"To the gentleman with whom it seems you correspond. Did you not tell me you had only seen him twice? You would not even admit his good looks, and yet it seems you are on sufficiently intimate terms to correspond with him!"

Lilian's brow cleared.

"Indeed it is the truth!" she said, quietly. "I never saw Mr. Ainslie but twice, and when his letter came this morning I was as much surprised as you could be."

"Do you know that Guy hates writing?—that it is with the greatest persuasion he can be induced to write a letter?"

"I am very sorry he did violence to his inclinations on my behalf," said Lilian, lightly. "But really I could not help it. I would have waited quite patiently until his sister had time to answer my letter."

"Do you mean that he only wrote instead of Kate?—that he sent you a letter simply because she could not?"

"I mean that, Lady Dacres."

"And it was not a love-letter?"

The blood came rushing to the girl's fair cheeks.

"Why should you think such things?" she cried, indignantly. "Lady Dacres, I can assure you that I have never given a thought to love or lovers for months. I did not even know but what Mr. Ainslie was engaged. Whether he be or not can make no difference to me."

"He *was* engaged," said Lady Dacres, with a strange pathos. "That union fell through, but his whole heart was in it. I do not think he will ever care to take another wife after losing his first love."

"Did she die?" cried Lilian, her blue eyes full of sympathy. "How very sad!"

"She did not die."

"Then they may come together yet?"

"I hope so."

Lady Dacres discovered she had been mistaken, and after a few civil phrases left the room; but, alas! she had taken Lilian's peace of mind with her.

Never would the world be quite the same to her again. She had thought of Guy Ainslie with the warmest gratitude of her nature; she had felt that under Heaven she owed all to him.

Surely of all the world *she* ought most to rejoice at his happiness; and now, when she heard he had had a *fiancée* whom he loved with all his heart, a terrible sorrow seemed to fill her soul, and she could almost feel a sort of gladness that some obstacle deferred his bliss.

It was monstrous, it was ungrateful, it was wrong; but Lilian had erred, in all innocence; never, until she sat alone in the firelight pondering upon Lady Dacres' sudden anger, did the whole truth of her misfortune come home to her.

She had mistaken love for gratitude; she had accorded a girlish fancy to Sir Ronald Trevlyn; but she had given a woman's worship

—a woman's heart—to the man who had come to her in her sorest need, Guy Ainslie, my lady's cousin.

In vain she checked herself, in vain she tried to think it a passing infatuation which she could conquer! Lady Dacres' accusation had opened her eyes to her one folly. She loved Guy now, she should love him till she died.

She wondered just a little to whom his love was given, and for whose sake Lady Dacres had been so suspicious of her; perhaps the future lady of Rose Bank was an intimate friend of Lilian's employer.

"They need not be alarmed," thought the poor girl sadly, as she went to her; "because he saved me from starvation and helped me in my direst need is no reason he should care for me. If my gratitude has deepened into love, if, having nothing else to care for, I have learned to love his memory, such a transformation will not take place with him. He will think of me kindly and pitifully, because men like him can't be hard upon a weak, defenceless girl; but no memory of me will disturb his peace; his thoughts will be with the *fiancée*, whom fate may some day restore to him, not with the poor orphan girl his charity rescued from starvation—it may be even from a sorrow worse than death!"

She took out the little note he had sent and determined to destroy it, since Lady Dacres evidently considered she had no right to it.

"Dear Miss Green,—

"My sister will write to you in a few days, meanwhile she thanks you for your note and enclosure. We are both very glad you find yourself comfortable at Dacres Castle, and we quite hope that the next time you come to London we shall see you at Leckenham.

"Yours very truly,

"Guy Ainslie."

It was so short and so simple, that Lilian decided she might keep it without wronging anyone, and so she folded it away in a little old pocket-book which had been her father's, and which in all the hurry and excitement of her flight from Earlsmere she had not forgotten to bring with her.

The next event of consequence was the departure of Sir John and Lady Dacres to London for the seaside.

"It will be very pleasant," said my lady, coming into the schoolroom condescendingly to say good-bye to the governess. "I always wanted a season in town. Sir John would linger abroad so long after we were married that London was empty when we got back, and before I was married I was too——"

"Too young, perhaps?" said Lilian, pleasantly.

"Too poor, I think, I was going to say. Kate and Guy are not what is called rich, you see, and I was dependent on them for every thing; besides, they kept me shut up like a nun. I might never have met Sir John if I had not been staying with some of my father's friends last spring."

"It is only a pleasure deferred. I hope you will enjoy yourself, Lady Dacres."

"Thanks, take care of yourself, Miss Green. Don't let those children worry you to death. By-the-by, I shall see the Ainslies; have you any message?"

But Lilian thought of that winter's evening in that same room when Lady Dacres had brought a cruel charge against her. She could not, remembering that, send any message to Guy, and somehow, she did not like to send one to his sister and leave him out. My lady smiled a little derisively.

"Out of sight out of mind," she quoted, lightly. "I shall tell them that's what it is, and that Mr. Darby has quite succeeded in obliterating their image."

A faint, sick feeling stole over Lilian's heart.

"Please do not say that, my lady! As to Mr. Darby, he is nothing in the world to me!"

"But he would like to be."

"Indeed you are mistaken."

"I have eyes. It seems that you have none. Why, Miss Green, unless you are the veriest coquette, you must have known whom it is Mr. Darby comes here to see."

"I thought he came to talk to you about the poor people."

Lady Dacres gave a ringing little laugh.

"The only poor person he talks to me about is himself. He seems to think he's very much to be pitied for being endowed by fate with a very big rectory, and no one but himself to live there."

It was impossible for Lilian to mistake my lady's meaning. She was speechless from dismay.

"There, don't distress yourself," said the elder woman, merrily. "I only hope Mr. Darby won't bring things to a climax while we're away. What should we do about Daisy and Pansy?"

A great calm fell on the Castle when its master and mistress had departed. Lilian felt happier than she had done since she left Earlsmere.

It was pleasant to live at the beautiful old mansion and know there was no one there she need fear to offend. Lady Dacres inspired her with a kind of dread, even when most amiable. Life was far more peaceful with only the two little girls to break her solitude, and the three enjoyed the lovely summer weather, and made many a little excursion among the picturesque country which surrounds Chepstow.

"If they would only stay away always," suggested Daisy, one night, "how very nice it would be!"

"But papa!" objected Pansy; "I should like to see papa sometimes!"

"Perhaps he would come," pondered Daisy; "but, oh, I would rather be without him than have mamma, too!"

"You should not speak like that, dear," said Lilian, though in her heart she quite agreed with the little speaker. "Lady Dacres is your mother now, and you ought to try to love her!"

"She doesn't love us!"

"You don't know. She has not much time to attend to you; but she has never been unkind to you, Daisy, or Pansy either."

Lilian thought she had scored a point in Lady Dacres' favour; for, indeed, she seldom troubled herself enough about the children to be unkind to them, or to interfere in any way with their amusements.

"You don't know," objected Pansy. "Once, before you came, she was dreadfully unkind. She slashed my hand right across with her riding-whip."

"Perhaps she did not mean to do it."

"She did! When I cried, she said it served me right!"

"Then you had been very naughty."

"I don't know," said the child, doubtfully. "I meant to be very kind to her. Do you remember her locket, Miss Green?"

"Your mamma wears half-a-dozen lockets."

"But the one that is *always* on her chain. That she never forgets to wear?"

Lilian recollected it well. It was of oval shape, of plain dead gold, rather large in size, and thoroughly well made, but not to compare with dozens of my lady's other gems; yet it was never laid aside. In morning costume or evening robes *that* locket always kept its place.

"Well," went on the child, easily, "we had been for a walk with nurse, and coming back I saw something glittering in the avenue, and, of course, I picked it up, and it was mamma's locket. I asked the butler where she was, and ran in with it to her. I thought she would be so pleased."

And even at that distance of time there was a sad ring in the child's voice, as though she had not forgotten her disappointment.

"And wasn't she pleased?"

"Carrying it the spring came undone. I suppose it got loosened by falling, and so I could see inside. There was a gentleman's likeness, and, oh! Miss Green, he looked so good and kind, I am sure he must have been very nice!"

"And you gave it back to your mamma?"

"She was in her dressing-room. She had just come in from a drive, and I gave it her open, just as it was. She hardly listened to where I found it. She just took up her whip and lashed my hand. I never shall forget the pain; and yet, somehow, it hurt me more that she should have done it just when I meant to please her."

From that moment Lilian never mentioned their stepmother to the children. She herself feared Lady Dacres almost as much as they did. The glittering eyes, the brilliant beauty, reminded her of the radiant fascinations of a serpent.

She had another trouble as the days grew longer. Mr. Darby seemed to have a marvellous knack of meeting her and the children in their evening walks. He was a handsome, genial young man about thirty, with a comfortable rectory, and an income which was luxurious for a bachelor.

From the moment of their introduction he had treated Lady Dacres' governess with the utmost consideration, but never until my lady's broad hint had Lilian fancied what his wishes were.

And now, as evening after evening he met them and sauntered at their side among the beautiful country lanes, as she heard Pansy openly tell him, it was strange he always had to come their way, or Daisy exclaim how odd it was they always met him, a great fear came to the lonely girl.

He was young, high-born, and comparatively rich. He was handsome, generous, and true; but yet she knew perfectly that she should never feel for Archibald Darby anything but a calm friendship. She who had been content to accept Ronald Trevlyn when she was an heiress, because she believed he loved her, now that she worked for her own bread meant to refuse a man ten times his superior in heart and feeling, and whose prospects were far, far brighter than any likely to be her own.

"I shall never love him," thought Lilian to herself; "and, oh, I hope he does not care for me! I never shall marry anyone—never, while I live!"

For, you see, she had learnt her own secret now. She knew she loved Guy Ainslie. She could never be aught to him. He would never guess her devotion, but, while her heart was his, she could never plight her troth to another man.

The moment she had dreaded came at last. One lovely July evening the little girls were invited to tea in the hayfield. The nurses would be in charge. They were altogether more suited to preside at the entertainment than Lilian, and so she profited by the rare leisure to take her sketching into the grounds and see if she could secure a distant view which had hitherto escaped her.

Absorbed in her occupation, she never heard the sounds of footsteps, she never knew she was no longer alone until the rector's voice fell on her ear.

"Miss Green."

"How you startled me!"

"I am very sorry."

"The children are making hay in the five-acre field," determined to ascribe his visit to them.

"I do not want the children, naughty little things!"

"They are not naughty."

"Well, they never have the sense to see when they are not wanted."

"Do you mean they inflict themselves on you?" asked Lilian, a little nettled; "but you know you always seek them out."

"I am very fond of them; but I get a little irate when they never let me have a word with you. This is an opportunity I have long been seeking. Miss Green, I want to speak to you very seriously, if you will listen to me."

"Please, don't," said Lilian, with a strange light in her blue eyes. "I don't want to be serious to-night. Everything is so bright and beautiful, I feel too happy to think of sad things."

"But things need not be sad because they are serious," he said, gently. "Believe me, Miss Green, sorrow shall never touch you if I can help it. I have come to-night to tell you that, and also that the dearest wish of my life is to persuade you to trust yours to my keeping, dear," and he bent over her eagerly. "Do you think you could ever learn to love me?"

Her blue eyes never sank beneath his scrutiny. He had not the power to bring lovelight to their depths or blushes to her cheeks. She answered him without a moment's hesitation, gently but firmly, and, oh, so sadly!—

"Why have you said this? Oh, why couldn't you let things be as they were! I was so happy, and you were my friend!"

"I will be your friend while I live; but, oh, my darling! friendship is not enough to satisfy the cravings of my heart! Dear, I love you so well that my life can never be quite perfect again without you! Won't you give me a word of hope?"

"I cannot—oh, I cannot!"

"I will wait so patiently!" he pleaded. "I will never hurry you. You shall take your own time about it if only you will promise that you will try to love me!"

"I wish I could!"

There was such a deep despair in her voice, such a yearning cry in its pathos, that the generous man forgot his own trouble to think of hers.

"What is it?" he asked, and he touched her black dress. "Do you mean that your loss is still too fresh for you to think of other ties? Do you mean you wear this for one who filled the place I covet?"

"I wear it for my father," she answered. "Not mine in point of law, but, oh, the best and dearest father girl ever had! I lost him not yet a year ago."

"But, dear, you will not forget him sooner for accepting a husband's love. I am sure he would like to feel his darling was in stronger protection than her own."

Lilian smiled wearily.

"You speak nobly," she said. "I wish—oh, I wish it could be as you say!—but I have no heart to give you. It is not mine to give."

"And you are engaged! What can the man be thinking of to let you lead such a life as this?"

"It is not an unhappy life; but I am not engaged, Mr. Darby. My wedding-day was fixed when my father died, and instead of being an heiress I had to earn my own living."

"You mean that he was coward enough to forsake you," cried the clergyman, passionately. "I should like to have the handling of him!"

"He did not forsake me—he wanted me to elope with him and be married privately, and I refused."

"But you love him still?"

She shook her head.

"I should never marry him, never—not even if he wished it; and I am not likely to marry anyone. Only you see I have no heart to give you, and so please forget all you have said!"

It was not the whole truth, but more she dared not tell him. Better he should think her pining for a faithless, worthless lover than that he should guess she had given away her whole heart to a man who had no thought of loving her.

The rector looked troubled, he paced up and down the narrow pathway with eager, restless steps; at last he stopped in front of her.

"That need be no obstacle."

"Mr. Darby, it *must* be!"

"No!" he said, gravely. "I know by instinct you are too pure and true to break your word. Promise me you will try to banish this unhappy feeling from your heart, and let me make you my much-loved wife, and do all that in me lies to make you happy!"

She shook her head.

"Don't you trust me?"

"Entirely!"

"Then, believe me, I would never reproach you for your want of affection. I would never mention the past to you; I love you so intensely that I believe firmly I should at last win some return, but even if I fail the fault would be mine, no shadow of blame could rest on you."

"Don't!" she said, faintly; "don't tempt me!"

"It is a temptation then?"

"Do you think it can fail to be when one stands friendless and alone in the world? The offer of a home and someone to love one is a very great temptation."

"Lilian!"

She started.

"Forgive me, I learned the name from the children. Lilian, suffer me to ask you one question. This love which steels your heart against me—I ask not if it is past or present—but this one thing I demand? Is it hopeless? Do you believe that any years of waiting will bring you nearer the one you love?"

"It is hopeless," she returned, promptly; "no years of waiting can alter it. I do not send you away because I have one shadow of belief that aught can bring me nearer my dream."

"Then, Lilian, you must *not* send me away. I don't ask you to have pity on me, my shadowed life and blighted hopes. I don't think much of winning a woman through her compassion; but Lilian, my love, my darling, I urge you to have pity on yourself!"

"Upon myself? What can you mean?"

"I mean, dear, that this life is not suited for you—that you are not formed to go from girlhood to womanhood, from youth to middle-age alone; and I mean, still more, that you are so friendless, so helpless, it seems to me that you cannot fight your own battles."

No need to say how gladly *he* would fight them; it was written in his kindling eyes.

"I am very happy here," she said, simply. "Lady Dacres is never unkind to me."

"But when she comes home this month and the Castle is filled with guests, do you think she will like it when she sees that the only rival to her beauty is her own governess? Do you not think your very grace and sweetness will tell against you?"

"I cannot think Lady Dacres as cruel as that."

"She is as cruel as the grave."

"Has she ever been cruel to you?"

"Never! To me she is the most gracious of hostesses; she little guesses that I know her story, and that the man whose life she blighted was my dearest friend."

"Ought you to tell me this?"

"I think I ought; you are at Lady Dacres' mercy, and I want you to know her true character. You will understand then that, loving you as I do, I cannot bear to think of you as liable to suffer through her caprices."

"Well!"

"You know that she was married last year—May, I think—that she was then a penniless beauty of eighteen, and Sir John Dacres was turned fifty."

"I have heard so; she told me herself."

"Did she? I don't suppose she told you that before she met Sir John she was engaged to one of the noblest men who ever walked this earth—that until a week of the day fixed for her wedding with him she kept up the deception; and then, just as he was expecting her back to spend the last days before their marriage at the home he shared with his sister, the news came that a special license had made her Lady Dacres."

Lilian's face had grown white, an awful fear had come to her.

"Are you sure?"

"I am perfectly sure. Ainslie and I had been chums at college. I daresay his cousin had heard of me often enough under the name of Grant, which I bore until I came into my uncle's property. I was to have performed the wedding. Do you think I can be mistaken, Lilian, when I have the memory of my friend's face before me now on that bright spring morning when he came to tell me all his hopes were vain."

"How could she! Oh! how could she!"

"Ah, child!" said Archibald, tenderly; "girls as pure as you can't understand the temptations of rank and wealth. She sold herself for Sir John's money. And now I ask you, Lilian, is such a woman likely to be a kindly friend to you? The moment you cross her wishes, however innocently, she will turn upon you with the cruelty of a serpent!"

"I must be careful not to cross them, then."

"And you prefer to stay here and take the risks? You like better to remain with such a woman as Lady Dacres than to become my wife!"

"Put it more truly," said Lilian, sadly. "I may be weak and erring, but I have just generosity enough not to take everything at your hands and give you nothing; for the rest I see very little of Lady Dacres, and the children are pleasant companions enough, and sadly neglected."

"You have disappointed me bitterly," he said, taking her hand in his; "and yet I love you the more for your truth and honour. You show me that there exists a noble, generous woman in the world, though I cannot win her."

"There exist many far nobler and far more generous. I hope you will win one of them."

He shook his head.

"I am not one to change!" Then in a lower key, "You will not refuse me your friendship, Lilian?"

"Oh, no! I will gladly be your friend!"

"Remember!" he assured her, "I can have no greater pleasure than to think and act for you. If ever you need a friend's advice or counsel—if ever you need a service you could have asked of a brother—ask it of me, and I will gladly do it. No time, no distance will change me; wherever you are, whatever happens, you will find me the same, ready and willing to aid you, longing still that a day may dawn when you will accept my faithful love!"

And then bending down he stooped and pressed his lips passionately to her broad, white forehead. It was his only adieu; another moment and Lilian was alone.

(To be continued.)

HIDDEN FROM ALL EYES.

CHAPTER XXXV.

The door slowly opened, whilst Godfrey, as if suddenly turned to stone, watched it without moving hand or foot to prevent it.

On the threshold stood Robin, her dark eyes wide and wistful, wandering eagerly round the room, her lips parted, her breast heaving, as with long repressed desire.

"I thought Victor called me," she said, disappointedly, in a soft, low voice.

Godfrey muttered a curse, and rising, unwillingly, went towards her. "Where's Pren? You know you ought not to be here." Though evidently much put out by her appearance his tone was kind.

She leant her head down on his shoulder like a weary child. "I am so sorry he isn't here!"

"But he never is; you ought to know it by this time. Go upstairs again, there's a good girl."

"No. I heard his voice," shaking her head, fretfully. "He's somewhere here, and you are keeping him from me," looking round with restless eyes. "What have you come for?" turning to Nella in sudden anger, her poor, crazed brain fired by jealousy. "You've taken him from me!—you've taken him from me! He's there behind your chair!" and she struggled frantically in Godfrey's grasp.

Nella stood with hands clasped and dilated eyes, watching the scene in silent terror as the moonlight fell on the faces of the brother and sister—the one stern and pale, as if with

the sorrow of years, the other wild and flushed with the hope and the passion which knew no control.

Oh what an amount of misery there is in the world, lying hidden away in gloomy corners where the breath of sympathy can never reach it with its healing whisper!

Nella looking on, as a silent spectator, felt that if Somerville had sinned he had suffered as well.

Who could gauge the power of temptation, when he saw the purest affection of his heart robbed of its sweetness and turned into the bitterest pain; and all this through the carelessness of a man, who called himself a friend; when he knew himself to be swamped in debt, and saw the only means of escaping from it destroyed, unless he hung on himself the burden of a hateful secret, and acted a fraud for the rest of his life?

Some thought of the kind occurred to her as she saw him standing before her with his mad sister in his arms, restraining her with gentle force, an expression of pity and pain on his troubled face, and for a moment she forgot his sins against herself.

"Robin dear, listen!" he said, persuasively. "That lady over there knows nothing of Victor, so she can't tell you anything about him; but if you go upstairs and thread enough beads, he is sure to come and fetch them. Make the strings as long as ever you can."

"As long as the carpet?" looking at him, seriously.

"Yes, longer than that—three door strings, so that you can tie them round him and he can't get away. Be quick, or it will be too late!"

"Ah, but I must find him first," a cunning look spoiling the beauty of her face. "Let me look in your pockets." It was a favorite employment of hers; but he could not let her wait for it.

"No, no; you can do that another time."

"I must do it first, or I won't go at all!" she persisted; and he gave in because he was afraid of angering her, although he was on thorns all the while. "There's a watch!" taking out his gold repeater, and holding it to her shell-like ear. "It always says the same thing. 'He's coming! he's coming! he's coming!' but oh!" with the deepest sigh, "it never comes true. A dear little pencil, how it shines in the light! and there's something at the end—what is it?"

"Our crest!"—biting his lip in his wild impatience. "A tiger's head on a sapphire."

"And this?" holding up a locket.

He snatched it from her hand. "You mustn't meddle with it."

"It isn't half so pretty as this," opening a small penknife, and feeling the sharp blade with her delicate little fingers.

"Take care, or you will hurt yourself. Give it to me; it's a nasty thing, and pricks."

But she went a little further off from him, looking down on the shiny bit of steel as if it had a fascination for her, murmuring something to herself, like a baby when it is pleased with a toy.

His patience was nearly worn out. He saw that Nella had replaced her hat which had fallen off, and knew that she was preparing to escape on the first opportunity.

If Prendergast would come it would make his position easier, but as yet he shrank from exposing Nella to that woman's stony stare, and resolved to manage without her, if he could.

Robin was generally tractable with him, but, like most people whose minds are unhinged, she was liable to going off into frenzied fits of passion at the slightest opposition to her wishes, and he was very anxious to avoid a painful scene.

He had seen the expression of horror on Nella's face, and felt it acutely, for here was the first strange eye which had seen his poor little Robin after her sad affliction.

It seemed so inexpressibly sad to him that she, the sweetest, most innocent child in the world, should become an object of fear or aversion; therefore his voice was very gentle as he constrained himself to pronounce the name he hated, and, laying his hand on her arm, told her that Victor would go away if she did not hurry upstairs to meet him.

She threw back her head with a wild laugh, tossing her hair in a cloud over her shoulders. The blood curdled in Nella's veins, as the laugh resounded through the gloomy house, and Somerville, seeing that she was frightened said sternly, "You must come, Robin, or I shall have to carry you!"

She stamped her foot, her white dress and dark eyes gleaming in the moonlight. "You shan't take me away!" she cried. "He's here, and that girl is hiding him."

With a sudden bound she sprang upon Nella, and throwing her arms round her neck, stabbed her white throat with the penknife.

Terrified with her hot breath in her face, her wild eyes glaring into hers, Nella tumbled back helplessly on a chair, with a startled cry, Robin clinging to her with the tenacity of a beast of prey.

It was only for a minute, and then Godfrey seized her, as in a grasp of iron. He tore the penknife from his sister's hand, flung it on the floor, unclasped her arms by force, and dragged her away.

"Good Heavens! you are bleeding," he cried in horror, as a small stream of blood trickled down on to Nella's collar.

"Never mind, take her away!" she gasped, shaking all over.

Godfrey did as he was bid, and hurried to the door, with Robin struggling in his arms. Looking over his shoulder with an anxious glance, he said, "I will be back directly," and stooping down to look the door, muttered an oath because the key was not there.

There was a bolt, however, which he drew with some difficulty, because Robin was thumping his arm with her clenched fists; and then, in a hurry to return to his prisoner, he hastened upstairs with long strides, as if he thought nothing of his heavy burthen, calling out to Prendergast to come and take her.

Directly his back was turned Nella sprang to the door, with a prayer on her lips that Heaven would help her, knowing that the whole future of her life depended on the use she made of the next two minutes.

Thank Heaven, the door yielded, the bolt having overshot the mark, and she was out in the passage. The barricade necessitated by the loss of the keys had not been replaced, but her fingers shook so that she could scarcely turn the handle of the heavy front door.

There were all sorts of noises overhead, piteous cries for the one that never came, and screams of passion.

Every moment she expected to hear Godfrey rushing down the stairs, and her heart seemed to stand still with fear.

With a vigorous wrench she pulled the door open, and a blast of cold wind came howling into the desolate house. Down the steps with one bound. Oh, heavens! how the reins clung together in a knot, as if she had done it on purpose to drive herself mad.

She got on to Limerick's back—how she never knew; but she scrambled somehow into the saddle, and shook the reins, for her whip was left behind in that horrible room, which was to have been her prison.

Limerick, tired of waiting outside, bounded forward, eager for his nice warm stall in the comfortable Somerville stables, and with a sob of joy she knew she was free!

But at that moment Godfrey rushed down the steps, and with a cry caught hold of the reins.

With ruin behind and safety in front, she was perfectly reckless as to what she did in in her desire to be free. She tugged at the reins with all her might, doing her best to incite Limerick to rear.

"For Heaven's sake take care!" Godfrey cried, in a fright; but she was in no mood to be careful.

Limerick threw up his head, and kicked out behind, plunging frantically, Godfrey still holding on to the reins till they cracked in his hand. Then the thorough-bred, finding he was free, stood up on his hind legs, till Nella thought he must fall over and break his back; and just as Somerville made a dash at his bridle, took the bit between his teeth, and bolted. On through the darkness, no matter how fast, under the shade of the ilexes, through the open gate, on to the high road, shining white in the moonlight; on as if pursued by a hundred devils, never turning her head to look back, scarcely daring to breathe till the ominous ivied Tower was left far in the distance, her mind bewildered by what she had been through, her imagination roused to such a state of excitement that every gate-post seemed to be starting forward to stop her, and the echo of Limerick's hoofs on the silent road seemed to belong to the horse of a pursuer.

Surely there was a sound in the distance. Limerick began to flag, but she urged him on as best she could, without a whip, and he was willing enough to answer the demand. At last, thank Heaven! the stone gateway of the park glimmered only a few yards off. Inside there would be perfect safety, and a kindly welcome, and hands outstretched to help her; and then she would be out of this horrible darkness, and without the sense of utter loneliness to crush her. Only a few yards more, and then with a rush another horse came beside her, and with a thrill of terror, though common sense told her that he could not harm her, no who saw Somerville's dark face turned to meet her own!

CHAPTER XXXVI.

"I thought you would be killed!" he gasped, with quivering lips, as he wiped the moisture from his forehead. "I expected to find you somewhere, dying in the road!"

She answered nothing.

In silence, but still side by side, they rode through the gates, the lodge-keeper giving a shout of joy as she recognized Godfrey, and rushing in to tell her husband—one of the gardeners who had been out with the searching-party—that the young master had come home safe and sound. Somerville gave her a nod, and rode on without stopping, absorbed in the most dismal reflections. His position had scarcely been so desperate on the day before, when, on reaching Kna's Tower, he found Prendergast beside herself with terror, because Robina was nowhere to be seen. Nobody knew what he suffered whilst scouring the country in search of her. Afraid of betraying his connection with the missing girl he had to tell a thousand lies, and go in for unlimited bribery.

Brookfield, the station-master at Alverley, had been told to hold his tongue, and know nothing of his movements, and as the request was coupled with a five-pound note, he had a convenient attack of blindness; but he never knew that he might not come upon some friend who would recognize him, and could not be silenced so effectually.

All that night he had gone from place to place, covered with mud, and frozen by the bitter wind, stopping every now and then wherever he chanced to see a public-house that was not closed, or a light in a cottage window.

Even Victor Maltravers might have pitied him if he could have seen him, struggling on through the darkness with white face and haggard eyes, always being sent in useless quests, but never finding the object of his search, patiently and resolutely doing his best, whilst despair was creeping into his heart. He might never have found her, till an advertisement, headed "Found dead," caught his eye, and his Robina, whom, to do him justice, he had always cherished most tenderly, had died like a homeless beggar, through cold and exposure; but it suddenly came across him that Victor Maltravers' home lay just over the borders of the next county; and it was possible that his sister might, in spite of her poor, deluded brain, re-

member that fact, because it was connected with the one man who haunted her life.

Just as the cold, grey morning broke, when Vere, Mallon, and Danvers had given up the search, and gone home, he struck across country into the road which led towards the old Grange, where the Maltravers had lived for centuries, and, when hope had almost failed him, found her lying on the grass, her head pillowed on a stone, her limbs all huddled together, as if she had shrunk from the cold, her hair all dank with the damp night air, hanging disconsolately over her face, and that face, when he lifted it gently, as white as death. With a sob in his throat, he raised her in his arms, and staggered to an inn, which he had just passed on the road. After some difficulty he roused the landlord, and told him that he must have a carriage and pair at once to convey a sick lady to his home.

The man came down, sleepy and grumbling; but, encouraged by the handsome price Somerville offered to pay, woke up an equally sleepy ostler, and told him to look sharp, and get a fly ready with the pair of cobs.

Whilst Robina was lying half asleep on a sofa, with a chamber-maid to watch her, Godfrey bethought him of his mare, which he had left tied up to a gate. Seeing a boy loafing about the stable-yard, he told him to follow him, and out there in the sloppy road concocted the story which caused such agony of mind to some of the inmates of Somerville Hall.

Pearl, shivering with the cold, was brought back to rest for a few hours in the stable, and the boy was told that, if he executed his commission properly, a five-pound note should be forwarded under cover to James Skinner, to the Rose and Crown, on Monday evening. He was on no account to think of mounting Pearl, but to lead her carefully all the way.

Having thus provided for the convoy of his horse, as well as for the safety of his own return to Nun's Tower without interruption, he lifted Robina, who was too much exhausted to make any resistance, into the carriage; and, having refreshed the inner man with something hot, took his place beside her.

When he arrived at the Tower, and placed her in Prendergast's charge, he thought the worst of his troubles were over.

Prendergast and the stable-boy had been up the whole night, and only came back one or two hours before he did—the woman nearly broken-hearted at being supposed to fail in her trust. Her grim countenance lighted up considerably, however, when she looked into the carriage-window, and saw Godfrey sitting on the front seat, with Robina's head resting on his shoulder.

The poor girl, utterly worn out, was carried upstairs and put to bed, where she slept till twelve o'clock. Then she insisted on being dressed, and seemed none the worse for her exposure to the cold. Exhausted by his exertions, and freed from anxiety on his sister's account, Godfrey never got up till shortly before Eleanor Maynard's arrival. He flattered himself that by his cunning ruse he had given all the people at the Hall so much to think of that no one would trouble himself to come and spy at a place, which he knew, or thought he knew, to be empty. Therefore he slept securely, and was in no hurry to wake.

All seemed to go so well: Nella came and gave herself into his hands without the trouble of a stratagem to bring her, and for a few minutes of joy he thought she was his for life. He thought of it all as he rode by her side, knowing that by his own rashness he had put it in her power to ruin him, and also that he had offended her so mortally that it was not in the least likely that she would wish to spare him.

The lights from the long row of windows in the front of the hall gleamed cheerfully through the darkness, shedding a welcome glare over the wintry park. It was a fine old place, of which any man, however high his birth, might be proud to be the possessor, and it might have been his in a few years' time, but for his folly that day. He had striven for it with all the cunning of his brain, and yet now that he had thrown away his last chance, he scarcely thought of it; the greater grief of losing the girl on whom he had set his passionate heart, swallowing up the lesser. Having made up his mind, in spite of common sense and prudence, to give up everything for her sake, it did seem hard to lose everything, and the girl as well.

His heart was a hell of conflicting passions—love, ambition, revenge, and jealousy; all had striven for the mastery, and left a chaos. In a few hours' time Victor Maltravers would be the hero of the day, with love and honour for his portion, instead of the shame under which he had bowed his proud head for a season. Cyril Vere would discover the double game he had been playing, and find out that his cousin had loved him from the first. Nella would be only too willing to fly to the shelter of his arms; and he, Godfrey Somerville, would be left out in the cold with his poor wild Robin for his only friend.

"No, no! curse it!" he thought, with a shudder; "it shall never come to that!" And the next moment his gloomy reverie was interrupted, for at the sound of horses' hoofs the doors were flung wide open, and a troop of eager people rushed out on to the steps.

"Well! Have you brought him back!" cried out Sir Edward's ringing voice, as he caught sight of the flutter of a habit, and knew that it must be his god-daughter, and that someone was riding by her side.

She looked up, saw his grey head shining in the light, with Vere's tall form towering behind it, and a crowd of eager faces full of joy; but the power of speech had gone from her, and without a word she slipped down from her saddle on to the gravel. Vere started forward, just in time to save her from falling under the horse; and whilst Sir Edward was grasping his nephew's hand, and Meta devouring him with her eyes, carried her through the throng into the hall. He stopped in front of the wide fireplace, and kneeling down on the fur rug raised her drooping face with his hand. The light of the gas fell full upon it; it was frightfully pale, but that was probably from cold and fatigue, and there was nothing to be alarmed at. But what was this that wetted his hand? *Blood!* "Good Heavens!" he exclaimed, almost with a shout. "Some one has murdered her!"

They all crowded round him, joy turned into horror. "Where's Somerville?" he said, sternly, as he pulled his handkerchief out of his pocket, and gently wiped the horrid stain from the soft white skin.

"It was an accident," and Godfrey pressed to the front; "but I did not know she had hurt herself. If you look, you will see her rein was broken. Limerick bolted as he did before."

"I wish I had been there instead of you," between his clenched teeth. "If decent care had been taken of her——" the rest was lost under his moustaches.

"Bring her into the boudoir," said Lady Somerville, tearfully. "Poor, dear child, it was we who sent her out."

"If she's hurt I shall never forgive myself," and Meta, overcome by her emotions, began to cry.

Godfrey put his hand gently on her shoulder. At that moment when he knew that in a few hours even the most faithful must desert him, he felt his heart warm towards her. Vere looked as if his touch would pollute his cousin; when unable to restrain himself, he stretched out his arms to help to raise her up, but Meta was certain not to shrink from him under any circumstances. Had she not given her word to stand by him through good report and ill? And yet when her father *knew* she would have to give him up like the rest.

The volley of questions with which he had been greeted was suspended in consequence of Vere's startled cry, and they scarcely remembered to ask any more; satisfied with the one evident fact that he was alive and well.

With Meta's small hand in his he stood looking down in silence on the still white face of the girl, whose little finger was infinitely more precious to him than *her* whole body.

Nella slowly opened her eyes, and looked round on the circle of anxious faces. Lady Somerville gently pulled aside the handkerchief which Vere had wrapped round her neck, and examined the small wound.

"That is nothing," she said, hastily; "nothing but a scratch;" and a gleam of hope shot through Somerville's weary heart. Perhaps, after all, she would consent to shield him!

CHAPTER XXXVII.

After every restorative they could think of had been tried, or at least suggested, and a small patch of sticking-plaster had been adjusted on the wound, Nella at her own urgent request was left in peace.

Somerville retired to his room, having seen everyone out of the boudoir, before he came upstairs. The next person who went in, whether Meta, Lady Somerville, or Vere, would be the recipient of her confidence, and his secret would be in the possession of the whole household before nightfall.

He was no coward, but his lips grew white as he thought of it. If only Robin had kept away, Nella would have been now his prisoner at the Tower.

Before the morning her mood might have softened; at any rate, he would have been able to convince her that the best chance for her reputation was to become his wife—and then she would have been his—his for ever.

The blood surged to his head, every pulse seemed to quicken at the thought. Now he might hunger for her, but only starve through the years to come; every calamity that befel him, doubly embittered by the consciousness that it was her sweet lips which had sealed his ruin.

As he was slowly dressing for dinner someone else would probably hurry down, and so the truth would be out before they took their places at the table; and yet he seemed as if he could not be quick, for every scrap of energy had deserted him.

What mattered it whether it was divulged before dinner or after? Vere and Mallon would crow none the less loudly because they had fed and been satisfied, but Meta might have one more chance of a dinner, when her appetite was going to be spoilt for a week.

Yes, she would cry for a week, and then woman-like, dry her eyes and turn her attention to someone else. She would make a patient, placid wife for one of the country squires; and if he hadn't an idea in his head, she would consider him the nicest and dearest old fool in the world.

"I might be eighty," he thought, as he looked in the glass, which reflected the haggard face of a man of forty or fifty—good-looking still, in spite of the ravages of passion—with sombre fire burning in the hollow eyes, which could blaze into furious resentment, or kindle into hottest love.

He looked twenty years older than he was, for trouble and the wear of constant anxiety age you as surely as the course of time, and the misery which had blighted his life had taken all the vivacity out of his expression.

"Twenty-six to-day—done for on my birthday! A pity I ever came into the world. I've made such a horrid mess of everything. There goes the gong!"

He went to a drawer, looked at something resting there securely in its case, and then, with a little nod, as if he were satisfied, turned his steps towards the corridor.

One door after the other opened in front of him; he stopped and listened intently.

There was the rustle of a dress in the hall and Lady Somerville went into the boudoir. Now the time had come! But no, she only stayed one minute, and went on to the drawing-room.

No one else turned aside to ask after Nella, so for an hour at least he was safe.

He stopped still in deep thought weighing

the chances; then walked rapidly back to his room, rang the bell, and threw himself into an arm-chair.

When the footman appeared, he sent down a message that he had a splitting headache, and would be glad if they would send him up something on a tray.

"If I am not here," he added, "when you come back, put it down by the fire and don't wait."

As soon as the man was gone he jumped up from his seat, went to the drawer again, unlocked the case, took out a revolver and placed it in his pocket; then he went softly downstairs, crossed the hall on tip-toe, and without waiting to knock, opened the door of the boudoir.

Nella was lying in all the abandonment of solitary repose; the lines of her graceful figure displayed by the close-fitting habit. Her curls were tumbling in wild disorder on her smooth, low forehead; her dark lashes rested heavily upon her pallid cheeks, and her lips were slightly parted as a child's when asleep.

To the man who was looking down on her with longing eyes she looked like the embodiment of all that was purest and yet most lovely in womanhood.

"Nella," he said, hoarsely.

The sound of his voice woke her, and she started up, the blood rushing into her white cheeks.

"How dare you come here?"

"I haven't come to bother you. I only want to ask what you intend to do!" folding his arms, in sullen resignation.

"To do?" she repeated, vaguely, not understanding what he meant.

"Yes, when are you going to tell them?"

"I don't know—sometime after dinner, I suppose."

"I want to know how long I have, that's all."

"Are you going to run away?" contemptuously.

"No, it has gone too far for that. But there are things that have to be done. One or two letters to write, and a will to make—even if it isn't properly attested—I think my uncle would carry it out."

"Why should you do that to-night?" looking up at him in perplexity.

"Because I want Robin to be taken care of. Poor child," huskily. "I've done the best I could, and kindness shown out of charity by others won't be like the real thing she always got from me."

"Won't you take her with you?" forgetting that he had said he was not going away.

"I should like to—but they would call it murder."

"Why no one could take such care of her as you would!"

"Don't remind me of it!" and he frowned. "The worst thing about it all is that I must leave her behind. Do you know," his voice changing; "it is my birthday to day? A joyful occasion, isn't it?"

"Do you expect *me* to wish you many happy returns?"

"Rather sarcasm wouldn't it, on the last?"

"You are not so very old, but that you may see forty or fifty at least."

"As a disembodied spirit. Theologians tell us that we may live for ever. But I trust it's a lie, for do you think I could rest in Heaven or Hades and see you married to Vere?"

No answer, as she rested her tired head on her hand, and wished that he would go.

"Nella," he said, more gently; "although you hate me so persistently, you are not the sort of girl to owe a grudge. If I ask you to wear this ring for me," pulling his signet off his finger, "I think you will do it for me."

He stooped and tried to take hold of her hand, but she snatched it away from him with a shudder.

"Nonsense, you will want it yourself; you couldn't do without it."

"Even if they left it on me, somebody would steal it from my coffin."

"What are you talking of?"

"Simply making a coarse allusion to where I shall be this time to-morrow."

"Dear me! are you going to get your horse to throw you, or to improvise an attack of black fever?" sarcastically.

"It is no joking matter," gloomily. "A jump into eternity is such guesswork, and there are one or two whom one does not like to leave behind."

"You are not going to kill yourself?" her lips whitening, her eyes wide open and awe-struck.

"Why not? You leave me no other alternative."

"I? It isn't I," faltering. "It would not be right for me to hold my tongue, and let the innocent suffer."

"No, you are so excessively virtuous that you could not take one step out of the straight path, even to serve a friend. You are perfectly right," throwing back his head; "and I don't ask for mercy. Victor Maltravers, Miss Arkwright, Vere and yourself shall be made happy like a fairy tale; and what can it matter to anybody if I go to the wall?"

"It would break Meta's heart," she said, her own feeling full of compunction.

"Women's hearts are not very breakable; but she will feel it, of course. That is *your* look-out, and you will have to console her as best you can!"

"You are only talking like this to frighten me. People who really mean to kill themselves never say a word about it."

Stung to the quick, he said, sternly,—

"I only owned to it, because I wanted a word of compassion. There, take my ring!" throwing it into her lap; "and remember that I might not have been half so bad"—hoarsely—"if I had not loved you against my will." Then he turned away.

"Oh, wait a moment!" she cried in horror, and he stood still. "Mr. Maltravers *must* be cleared; and it would be wicked of me to hold my tongue."

"Did I ask you Blab it out before the world. My answer is here," and he drew the revolver from his pocket.

She put her hand before her eyes, and shivered.

"You wouldn't use it! I know you wouldn't use it."

"Will nothing but the bare fact convince you?" calmly cocking it, and at the same time placing himself before her. "You think it's a sham, and mere bravado? Then see for yourself." There was no difficulty in finding out the exact place of his heart, for it was beating like a thousand hammers. "You are constraining me to go, without a will, but for Heaven's sake, see that Robin is taken care of!"

"Oh, Godfrey, don't!" and with a sob of terror she sprang from the sofa and caught his arm.

He looked at her with a softening smile, his lip quivering. "Are you sorry for me?"

"I can't see you die," trembling all over. "And yet, oh, Heaven! what am I to do?"

"Good-bye, Nell. One last kiss, and this bother will be over."

"No, I can't bear it," sobbing convulsively. "Won't you tell them of your own free will? and then they will all forgive you."

"Yes, if you will wait till after Tuesday."

"You won't deceive me?"

"You had better let me die!" looking at her with the pent-up longing of his soul in his eyes. "It can only be done once."

"I should never forgive myself—never forget it—it would haunt me all my life," clinging to his arm.

"*You* haunt me day and night—but you've no pity."

"I pity you now from the bottom of my heart," the tears running down her cheeks. "In spite of all you've done—I—forgive you!"

"Oh, Nell!" and a sudden sob rose in his throat.

Just then there was a tap at the door, which neither heard. It opened and closed abruptly for it was only Cyril Vere bringing a glass of wine for his cousin, which he was sure would do her good, and he saw enough to make him retire very speedily.

Unconscious of the interruption, Nella went on softly,—"You will tell the whole truth about Victor Maltravers, so that there shall not be a shadow of doubt left in anyone's mind—that you promise me."

"Oh, yes, I promise," his eyes still fixed on her, as if their glances had taken root upon her face.

"And if Meta marries you, you will do your best to make her happy?" knowing that she could not ask him to give her up, because it would simply break her heart.

"If she marries me! About as likely as that I should be king of England."

"I think she will."

"Especially when she hears that, over and above my other crimes, I asked another woman to be my wife!"

"She won't hear that from me," in a low voice. "Now go; but before you go, let me have this," putting her hand on the revolver.

"Don't touch it!" he cried, in a fright, as he uncocked it. "I wouldn't let you have it for the world."

"It would be safe with me," dropping down on to the sofa.

"You never know till you are driven into a hole, like I was."

"Please go. But stay!" suddenly recollecting; "you haven't given your promise."

"Yes, I have. Maltravers shall be all right!"

"It wasn't that. You will remember that your life was given you by the Almighty—and not take it," her voice low and awe struck.

"I will remember that I long ago gave it to the devil, and try to cheat him of the bargain. There, will that satisfy you? Oh, Nell—it's hard!"

It rushed over him what an empty, miserable thing his existence must be without her, and, overpowered by his emotions, he hurried from the room, his kiss upon her hand, his signet at her feet.

(To be continued.)

An ingenious French writer observes that those who depend on the merits of their ancestors may be said to search in the root of the tree for those fruits which the branches ought to produce.

The finer the nature the more flaws will it show through the clearance of it. The best things are seldomest seen in their best form. The wild grass grows well and strongly one year with another; but the wheat is, by reason of its greater nobleness, liable to a bitter blight.

The Artillery Fern.—The artillery fern, or flower, as it is sometimes called, is a curious and beautiful plant which is not very generally known outside of rare collections or of florist's green houses. It acquires its singular name from the military and explosive fashion with which it resists the action of water upon it. If a branch of the fern, covered with its small red seeds, be dipped in water and then held up to the light there soon commences a strange phenomenon. First one bud will explode with a sharp little crack, throwing into the air its pollen in the shape of yellow dust. This will be followed by another, and another, until very soon the entire fern-like branch will be seen discharging the miniature volleys with their tiny puffs of smoke. This occurs whenever the plant is watered, and the effect of the entire fern in this condition of rebellion is very curious as well as beautiful. As the buds thus open they assume the shape of a miniature Geneva cross, too small to the naked eye to attract much attention, but under a magnifying glass they are seen to possess very rare and delicate beauty.

TO A SLEEPING CHILD.

Asleep, I may not kiss thee now,
Or lift the tress of auburn hair
That flies so lightly on thy brow,
As if it deemed its place was there;
No, precious one, I will not break
A slumber pure and sweet as thine,
But I will watch till thou shalt wake
And turn those laughing eyes to mine.

Oh, thou hast touched within my heart
A hidden spring, so deep, so clear,
It would be death with thee to part,
For thou as life to me art dear.
Asleep, and in thy hand a toy,
Thy lips are parting in a smile;
What dreamest thou, my cradle joy,
What visions stir thy soul the while?

Thy tiny boat is on a stream,
Whose mossy banks and fairy bowers
Are bathed in morning's fairest beam,
And covered o'er with buds and flowers;
But, darling, who—ah, who can tell
Thy future lot? or who can know
If yet the stream will rise and swell,
Or onward still as calmly flow?

If love with fortune can prevail
To keep the storms of fate at bay,
A gentle breeze will fan thy sail
And hope's bright wings will o'er thee play;
And thou through all thy life wilt glide
Serenely o'er a pearly deep,
With rippling wave and silver tide,
As tranquil as thy infant sleep.

F. C.

REDEEMED BY FATE.

CHAPTER XXIV.

If he had struck her a violent blow, and stunned her, Sybil could not have fallen back more utterly powerless than she did under the influence of those terrible words.

Every drop of blood forsook her face, her hands fell inertly on her lap, and she gazed up at him with wide, frightened eyes, that were, for the moment, true mirrors of her soul.

But she was a woman of immense nerve, of undaunted courage, and it was the *suddenness* of the accusation that affected her so powerfully, coming as it did just when she had felt herself safest, and when the success for which she had striven and sinned seemed almost within her grasp. In a few instants she recovered her self-possession, and sprang to her feet, facing him—her chest heaving, her eyes flashing.

"What do you mean—how dare you make such a charge—I say, how *dare* you?" she cried out, the words falling with a harsh, metallic sort of ring from her pallid lips.

"I dare make it, because I have means to prove it. Do you think I would impeach you, or anyone else, so foully, unless I were sure of the truth of what I said? Listen, and you shall hear the evidence against you."

He took hold of her hands, and forced her back into her seat again, while he stood in front of her, loathing, with all his soul, the sickening task justice compelled him to perform.

"The way in which Fate has made me your Nemesis would alone be sufficient answer to those who say our life eddies in blind uncertainty, tossed about by chance, as a leaf is tossed by the wind," he began, almost solemnly. "Step by step, I am enabled to track you, although you surrounded yourself by every precaution possible, and deemed your guilty secret known only to Heaven and yourself. The first time my vague suspicions took definite shape was last night when Dr. Clifford, unable to explain the cause of Lady Urwicke's illness, told me of the strange odour in her room, which he attributed to the flowers you had taken there. I then called to mind how, an hour or two earlier, I had seen you dropping something into them; and this gave me a clue which it was not difficult to follow up. Some years ago I took a fancy to study chemistry, and it happened that the professor with whom I read had spent the greater part of his life in India, and was thoroughly conversant with its pharmacopœia. I remembered he once told me of a friend of his who was killed through inhaling the perfume of flowers which had been medicated with a certain deadly essence; and I particularly recalled his description of the blue shade on the face, which was the only sign the poison left—for it had this peculiarity, that the symptoms it gave rise to might easily be attributable to natural causes, and even a post-mortem examination would fail to detect any traces of it, if it were swallowed, instead of being inhaled. Now I had seen on Lady Urwicke's face that same blue tint, and her symptoms answered to those the professor described; so starting with the assumption that she was being poisoned, I asked myself this question: 'Who has a motive for wishing to get rid of her?' and the answer was, 'Miss Ruthven!'"

He paused a moment; but she said nothing, only looked at him with those shining eyes, in whose depths fear and hatred struggled hard for the mastery.

"Granting this, I knew you would have every chance for carrying out your plans, because I had learned from your own lips how you took flowers into Lady Urwicke's room at night; and then, having found means and opportunity, I looked to see how you had become cognizant of the drug, and how you had obtained it. I had surprised you, some time ago, studying a book on India. I saw the same book in your room, and I was in the library when you brought it back and put it in its place; so it struck me that it was here you had found your knowledge, and I reached the volume down, with the result of discovering a page torn out of *a chapter that treated of poisons*. Then I argued in this wise: 'Miss Ruthven has been studying this chapter; and, in order to make herself perfect in her lesson, took the book to her own room. To-night the doctor came unexpectedly, and remarking the density of the atmosphere in the sick chamber ordered out the flowers she had just taken in.' As a rule, there was no risk attending the roses, for they were medicated late in the evening; and only the occupier of the bed near which they were placed would feel their noxious consequences, as in the morning the windows would probably be thrown open and the fresh air let in.

"Well, for once your calculations were at fault; and as you carried the flowers out Dr. Clifford's observation made you fear lest he should by any chance suspect you. This was not the case; but there is not a saying truer than that a guilty conscience needs no accuser, and so your logical mind seized on what was most likely to connect you with the crime—supposing it to be discovered. The only thing was the presence in your private apartments of the book describing the poisons and its effect; and as that book was a rare and valuable one, and catalogued, and as you knew it would be missed if you destroyed it, you contented yourself with tearing out the leaf giving the name of the drug, and the quantities to be used, and restored it to its place. Am I right, Miss Ruthven? Was this the train of reasoning you followed?"

Not a syllable from the panting, white-faced woman in the chair, who thus saw the inmost depths of her soul held up to view, and pitilessly analysed.

"Then came the last point, namely—how you had procured the essence. And this I determined to solve, for I had a clue to it, having already seen you enter the shop of Antonio Lescarre under circumstances that, even at the time, I thought very strange. So this morning I went to London—first of all visited the British Museum, where I obtained a duplicate copy of the book on India, and transcribed portions of those particular pages, 127 and 128. I will let you hear my extract."

He took from his pocket a sheet of paper, and read:—

"'This powder may also be distilled into an essence, which is one of the surest and most deadly of known poisons. Combined with any vegetable substance, it exhales an odour that, according to the quantity absorbed, is more or less prejudical to health, especially if it be breathed during the night. For example, five drops on a rose would be sufficient to cause death to the inhaler; while the same quantity, distributed in a bouquet of flowers and placed in a room, would impregnate the air, and produce faintness and lassitude in a person breathing it for any length of time. If this process were repeated for ten or fourteen nights in succession the victim would succumb either to a violent paroxysm of pain resembling convulsions, or to prostration, producing coma, and ending in death.'

"I need not read you any more of what I have copied—it only gives the quantities and manner of using them, and then describes the symptoms which I have already spoken of," said Philip, replacing the paper in his breast-pocket. "I have but to add, that on leaving the Museum I went to Antonio Lescarre's laboratory, and procured from him a phial of the 'eau blanche,' the same in all respects as the one he sold you, and which I have in my possession at the present moment, so you see I am armed at all points. You laid your plans well, Miss Ruthven. Lucrezia Borgia or La Marquise de Brinvilliers could not have calculated to a finer nicety; but, like them, you forgot one thing—that retribution which follows the footsteps of crime, dogging them on, on, until it brings them to the scaffold!"

With a faint, half-strangled cry she put up her hands to her face and covered it, as though shame had at last touched her.

"Well," she said, presently, in a dull, strained voice, "and having discovered all this, what do you intend doing with your knowledge?"

"Lord Urwicke comes home to-night, so I shall go to him, produce my proofs, tell him that if he wants anything farther he can confront you with Lescarre, and leave the alternative in his hands."

"No, no!" she shrieked, falling on her knees before him, in a despair that was terrible to witness. "You will not do this—you must not! Trample on me! kill me! tear my very heart out, rather than let *him* know the depth of my sin!"

Philip was touched, in spite of his loathing, at her humiliation.

To fight against a woman was in itself hateful, still he felt justice demanded the exposure of her crime.

"Keep my secret!" she cried again, convulsively clasping his hands as though nothing should ever induce her to let them go. "Impose what penalty you like on me, make your own conditions, only spare me public shame!"

She looked like the Lamia, writhing there in an agony that was tenfold worse than if it had been physical—her dark hair dishevelled and falling about her shoulders, her white fingers wreathed round his, her bosom panting as if her heart would burst all barriers in its efforts to be free—the beauty of her face made awful by its despair.

No thought of denying her crime came to her.

The accusation had been so entirely unlooked and unprepared for that it left her powerless even to disclaim it.

"Have pity—have pity!" she repeated, wildly.

He shook himself free from her clasp, and made a step backwards.

"Had *you* pity when you doomed that young life, and hour by hour watched it slowly sapping away?" he said, sternly. "When you placed the roses by the bedside did remorse come to you as you thought of their deadly mission? No! I verily believe you were utterly callous

—you *must* have been when you saw all the vigour and vitality of the unfortunate girl ebbing from her, and knew that unless you spoke death would end it!"

"She is not dead!" muttered Sybil, but there was an echo of fierce regret in her voice as she spoke.

"No—not yet, and pray Heaven, she may not die! The chances are, however, that she will. Little less than a miracle can save her, as you know."

"Then will you sacrifice the living for the dead?" she exclaimed, making one more appeal. "Can I bribe you?"—wildly. "I have jewels—I have the family diamonds in my possession—take them, if you will only spare me! You are a poor man—think what you might not do with the money they brought you!"

He turned away with a gesture full of disgust, and seeing it, and the hopelessness of her prayers, she fell forward, her head bowed in her hands, her attitude that of the repentant Magdalen.

But there was no repentance in her heart, only a fierce anger against the man who had unmasked her, an impotent desire that her purpose had been consummated. What remorse she felt was not for the crime itself, but its discovery, which had thus lowered her to such degradation.

Suddenly she rose and pointed to the door.

"Go!" she cried, with all her old imperious command. "At least I am a free agent as yet, and I will have no one here exulting over my misery."

"Heaven forbid I should exult over yours, or anyone else's!" he exclaimed.

"Then why did you come here—why did you not wait until Lord Urwicke returned, and carry your tale straight to him?"

"For a twofold reason. Firstly, I wished to guard against the possibility of your working further evil by showing you your plot was known. Secondly, as I have been taking a part I detested in thus playing the *rôle* of detective, I thought I would give you the chance of leaving the country at once, and in this case, perhaps, Lord Urwicke may waive his right to prosecute you."

"How good of you—how grateful I ought to be!" she exclaimed, clenching her hands together till the nails cut in the delicate pink flesh, and speaking with bitter, vehement contempt. "But for all that I tell you I hate you—I would kill you if I dared!"

And he, looking in her evil glittering eyes, did not for a moment doubt she meant what she said.

CHAPTER XXV.

Even since the morning, when he had heard of Philip's absence, Sir Jasper Ruthven had been in a state of nervous excitement that would not let him attend to his ordinary business, or even find pleasure in the society of his betrothed.

He remained in his study, the window of which looked on the terrace, and thus commanded a view of the approach; and when he was not gazing out in the hope of seeing Greville appear, he paced backwards and forwards, absorbed in moody reverie.

Of course, when he had found the artist had left the house early, he immediately concluded he must have gone to London to see Pierson; and this step took him entirely at a disadvantage, inasmuch as he had carefully looked through all the letters that came to the house, and never having found one from the barrister amongst them, felt himself safe from surprise. He watched Philip come in on his return, and at once saw, from his pale and hurried demeanour, that something unusual was the matter—though, in this instance, as the reader knows, his penetration deceived him, and he put an entirely wrong construction on an excitement that had nothing whatever to do with his own private concerns, but was entirely on Muriel's account.

A little while later he sent a message requesting the artist to go to him in the study, and it happened that Philip met the footman just as he was leaving Sybil's apartment. Instead of obeying the summons, he proceeded to Lady Urwicke's rooms, where, sitting in a recess in the passage outside the door, he found Haidée, who held up her finger to enjoin silence.

"Lady Urwicke is asleep," she murmured, "and I am keeping watch to see that no one disturbs her."

"And where is Dr. Clifford?"

"He has just gone to the surgery to make up some fresh medicine, but he will be back directly."

"Does he think his patient improving?"

"He will not say. I fancy he is waiting for Sir James C—— to arrive before giving an opinion."

Philip was silent for a minute. He had intended questioning the doctor, and, if he thought Muriel worse, telling him all he knew of the cause of her illness, so as to enable him to treat it the better. But for all that he was anxious to avoid the necessity, because he wished to see the Viscount first, and leave to him the initiative of acting as he pleased, and this he could *now* feel satisfied to do, for as Lady Urwicke was asleep it followed there was no immediate danger.

It was some little time since he had last spoken to Haidée, and he was not slow to observe the change in her. All her pretty rosy colour had *gone*, her mouth drooped down at the corners like that of a tired child, and the eyes—those forget-me-not eyes that had formerly brimmed over with youth's sunny brightness—were now languid with an infinite weariness; as if she found the burden of life too heavy for her frail young shoulders.

"You don't look much like a happy bride-elect," he observed, unable to resist the temptation of staying to speak to her now an opportunity offered, although he knew Sir Jasper was waiting below.

The girl did not reply, but her slim white hands, that had been lying loosely on her lap, clasped themselves nervously together.

Philip came a step nearer, and bent down to look in her face.

"Tell me Haidée—*are* you happy?" he said, in a low, deep voice, and just for a moment, her eyes, as if compelled by some magnetic power, raised themselves to his.

"*Happy!*" she repeated, and in her tone was such utter, hopeless, intense despair that the one word was of itself a revelation and an answer to his question.

"Is anyone happy?" she added quickly, as if fearful of having betrayed herself. "If you were to search the wide world over would you find, do you think, one single person free from trouble?"

"Perhaps not among the old, but among the young—yes! Youth is the season of joy, and—love."

She turned away with a little shiver.

"Still, those are not the highest goods—one can dedicate one's life to something nobler than one's own selfish enjoyments," she said, with the accent of one who was repeating an argument by which she had tried to convince herself.

"Can one? What, then, do you place higher?"

"Duty!"

"And is it duty that has forced you to act as you are acting now, that has made you give up the man you love, and promise yourself to another?" he asked, taking hold of her little chill hands, and holding them tight in spite of all her efforts to free them.

She did not answer.

"Your silence is a reply that means 'yes'—the yes you hesitate to utter," he exclaimed, triumphantly; "Haidée, I am assured, in spite of all that has passed, you still care for me. Ah! darling, come back—give up this wicked bartering of your soul—be true to yourself, to love, and me!"

The passionate tenderness of his voice as he leaned over her—until his hair brushed her brow—almost unnerved her. The longing to throw herself on his breast, and tell him she would let everything go by—her duty to her father, her promise to Sir Jasper—was so great, that to avoid giving way to it she shut her eyes, so that they might escape the vehement pleading of his.

"Hush!" she said, a little wildly. "Do not tempt me—you don't know what you would have me do!"

"I would have you save yourself from the commission of a great crime that will steep you in misery as long as you live!" he answered. "I would keep you from stepping over the precipice, on whose very edge you are now standing. What do you think your life will be, tied for ever to that of a man you don't love?"

"I do not know. I try to keep myself from thinking," she said, and no reply could have been more characteristic of her nature, or more eloquent of her suffering.

"*You try to keep yourself from thinking!*" he echoed. "Poor little sweetheart!—then you must indeed be most miserable; and if that is the case *now* it will be tenfold—a hundred fold—worse supposing you married Sir Jasper. But I tell you, Haidée, you have no *right* to marry him, seeing that by so doing you will ruin three lives; your own, his, and mine! Believe me, if he knew what your feelings were, he himself would shrink from making you his wife."

"You are mistaken"—with bitter, incisive, emphasis; "he does know quite well, and it makes no difference whatever to him!"

"Then!" eagerly; "leave him out of the question, and think only of yourself and me. There is something in your conduct I cannot understand; but, for all that, I have a conviction your sentiments for me remain unchanged. Could I, indeed, think otherwise, when the remembrance of what has passed between us is ever present to me—when I yet feel the pressure of your sweet lips against mine—yet see your upraised eyes full of love that you have told me fifty times would never die! Women change, I know; but not suddenly—not in a day, an hour, as you did; and unless I believe you the falsest, cruellest, coldest of your sex, I must yet believe you love me!"

Carried away by the excitation of the moment, he caught her in his arms, and for an instant she made no effort to be free, but yielded herself utterly to the sweetness of a caress that she told herself should be an eternal farewell. Then she wrenched herself away.

"Philip!" she exclaimed, her voice low and shaken, while she threw out her hand with a pitiful, imploring gesture, "for my sake, for the sake of something that I believe to be holier and more imperative than love, do not say another word to me! Go away from this house, and don't let me see you again, and then perhaps I may do what I know it is right I should do with less difficulty, less pain. Listen to me"—she came and stood before him, the pallor of her face lighted up by her steadfast eyes, while the feverish unrest of her manner had given place to a strange calm—"I can never be anything to you, and I *must* marry Sir Jasper. Why I may not tell you, but the reason is one that all the sophistry in the world will not render less urgent, and so—so you and I must say good-bye! I had never intended to have told you even this much, but I cannot bear that you should think me deliberately false, and I suppose my will is as weak as my love is strong! Perhaps"—her breath coming in quick little gasps—"in the future Heaven may comfort both of us, but now there is a gulf between us that neither can span, and so—dear love——"

She broke off abruptly, and clasped her hands to her throat as if she were choking; and then, forgetful for the moment of the task assigned her, she ran swiftly along the corridor, leaving him standing there to ponder over her words.

* * * * *

"You wished to see me?" he said, a few

minutes later, entering the study where Sir Jasper was sitting, moodily and impatient, awaiting his arrival.

"Yes. You seem, however, to have been in no hurry to present yourself," was the somewhat irritable answer, as Sir Jasper waved him to a seat.

"I did not think you had anything of importance to say to me!"

"Then you were mistaken, for what I have to say is of very great importance so far as your future is concerned."

"My future!" repeated Philip, surprised at his manner. "It is very kind of you to interest yourself in it!"

He looked rather hard at the baronet, who was evidently nervous and ill at ease—a most unusual phenomenon, for as a rule he was remarkably self-possessed, and indeed prided himself on the perfect control he had acquired over the expression of his feelings.

"I have a motive for interesting myself in you, a very strong one," he said, slowly, while his lips twitched under his heavy moustache, "and the time has at last arrived for me to declare it! Fate plays us many strange tricks, but she never played a stranger than when she sent you under this roof, Philip Greville!"

"What do you mean?" asked the young man, eagerly, and bending forward.

His thoughts were still upon Haidée, and his first idea was that the baronet had discovered his former relation with her, and was now about giving him his *congé*, and so preventing any possibility of future intercourse between them.

His employer's next words undeceived him.

"Do you remember the night you arrived here, when I came upon you in the corridor?"

"Yes," wonderingly.

"I met you rather suddenly, and—but perhaps you did not notice it—was somewhat upset as I saw you."

"I *did* notice it," put in Philip, quietly, "and I also fancied that the excuse you made hardly explained it."

"You were right. I was very much startled, and for a twofold reason. Firstly, by the mark on your arm; and, secondly, the extraordinary likeness you bore to someone I had once known and loved."

At the last two words Greville started violently—a strange sort of chill that he could no more have described than he could have explained its origin seemed to lay hold of his heart and hold him silent. It was not that he really suspected what was to follow, but rather that the shadow of the coming event had already fallen upon him.

"Do you know to whom I allude?" continued Sir Jasper, whose eyes had never left his face.

Philip shook his head.

"Grace Seaforth."

The artist received the announcement in silence.

"The resemblance was so striking that I could not get rid of the impression it had left upon me," added the Baronet, who seemed to have gained calmness as he proceeded, "and so, when Lady Urwicke came, I questioned her regarding you, and learned all the details of your history. Later on I saw a miniature she gave you, and caught a glimpse of a bundle of letters, and these letters it was a matter of such moment for me to see in order to set all doubts at rest, that I went in your room that same night and took them."

"Then it *was* you!" exclaimed Philip, interrupting; "and where did you disappear to from the corridor?"

The baronet looked rather discomposed at he question.

"I contrived to get past you"—Philip knew this was untrue—"and I think you will pardon my action when you know the motive. Those letters were some I myself had written over twenty years ago."

"*You!* But"—after a slight pause—"they were not signed by your name."

"Yes, my second name—Philip."

There was a dead silence, during which the two men looked at each other with an intentness that seemed as if it would penetrate the mask of all outward disguises, and pierce the thoughts of the heart itself.

"Do you know in what relationship Grace Seaforth stands towards you?" inquired Sir Jasper, presently, and moistening his dry lips as he put the question.

"I believe she was my mother!"

"You are right, and your father is——"

"Who?" exclaimed the young man, and he veritably held his breath till the answer came.

"Myself!"

CHAPTER XXVI.

At first, after hearing Sir Jasper's declaration, Greville sat perfectly still, staring at him in a half stupefied way, then he sprang to his feet, exclaiming vehemently,—

"It is not true—it cannot be true! My father died *before* my mother, and it was the shock of his death that killed her. I remember perfectly well hearing her cry out, 'Your father is dead, Philip,' just before she was seized with the attack that directly afterwards proved fatal. She had a newspaper in her hand at the time, and I have always believed she had accidentally caught sight of an account of his death in it."

"So far you are right. I was travelling just then from Heatholiff to London, and there was a collision between the train I was in and a luggage. I was slightly hurt, but instead of putting my name down in the list of injured it was included amongst the fatalities, and this is no doubt what Grace saw."

"And how was it you did not make any effort to come to her?"

"I did make an effort as soon as my injuries would allow me to move, and went to Llantressan, where I found the cottage shut up, and learned the news of Grace's death and your departure with Mrs. Maxwell. I made every inquiry possible concerning the latter, but could not discover her whereabouts, and so at last I gave up the search as futile; and feeling sure you were in good hands—for an old woman in the village, who had done some work at the cottage, told me the lady had adopted you—I let the matter rest."

"A most affectionate parent!" sneered the young man, his lip curling with the indignant scorn he was unable to repress. "If what you say be true—and I hope to Heaven it is not!—I have, indeed, small reason for congratulating myself on the discovery of my *father!*"

The baronet's eyes drooped, and he bit his lip.

"As much as I have in finding a son, seeing that you receive the announcement in such a manner," he retorted. "However, we are not women, and so we can dispense with sentiment."

"You seem to have succeeded perfectly in doing so up to the present—so far as I am concerned! But"—vehemently—"I will not accept all you say on faith. What proof have you to offer of the truth of your statement?"

"Proof! Is not my word sufficient? What possible motive could I have for desiring to claim you for my son if such were not the case? Do you think it at all likely I should attempt to *coin* a story like this merely for the pleasure of making myself out to be your father?"

No, Philip did not think it in the least likely, for evidently Sir Jasper entertained no particular degree of affection towards him, whether he was his father or not.

"Then why have you so suddenly awoke to the fact of my existence, after ignoring it for so many years?"

"You forget it is not so very long since you came here, and since your existence was, in a measure, forced upon me—for I will not deny I should have been much better pleased had Fate kept us apart!" returned Sir Jasper, coolly; and with a sudden change of tactics, as he observed the scarcely-veiled hostility of Philip's manner. "The sight of you only serves to remind me of a folly committed in earliest youth, that has been bitterly repented in my more mature years, and which I would fain have altogether forgotten. At first I decided to keep you ignorant of the relationship existing between us!"

"Why?"

"Because it was one I could not acknowledge before the world!"

Philip grew even paler than before, and his hands clenched themselves together with a sudden spasmodic movement, but, ere he could speak, the baronet continued, rapidly,—

"When I first knew Grace Seaforth I was very young indeed—barely twenty; and her beauty fascinated me, as it would have fascinated any other boy of my age. I prevailed upon her to leave her home, and in London we went through a ceremony which she supposed to be a marriage, but which was, in reality, nothing of the kind. You need not express your indignation"—as Philip half rose from his chair—"I know as well as you can tell me, that my behaviour was abominable; but I suppose other men have acted in the same way before; and I had the excuse of being madly in love with a girl whose humble birth would not allow me to marry her. I will, however, do her the justice of saying she believed herself to be my wife. Afterwards, to prevent any suspicion of the truth leaking out—for my uncle, Sir Edgar, was an excessively proud man, very tenacious of his family honour, and at that time I was entirely dependent on him—I took the cottage at Llantressan, and installed Grace in it; and there, some twelve months later, you were born."

He paused a moment, but Philip had put up his hand to hide his face, and made no attempt to speak.

"I used to go down to Llantressan pretty frequently at first, but by degrees my visits grew fewer and farther between; and it happened, when my uncle died, I had not seen Grace for some time; and was quite unaware of the precarious tenure by which her life was held. Perhaps you understand now how it was that I did not persevere in my attempts at discovering your whereabouts. In point of fact, I believed you would fare far better under the protection of the lady who had adopted you than if I myself had seen to your education and bringing up."

"Of that I do not entertain the slightest doubt!" put in the young man, bitterly. "And may I ask why, having kept this secret so long, you have now thought fit to reveal it to me?"

"I have considered the matter very carefully, and arrived at the conclusion that it would be well for you to learn the truth. It has come to my knowledge that some sort of understanding formerly existed between you and Haidée Darrell; and this being the case, it is much wiser for you not to remain under the same roof, and so I resolved to let you see exactly how matters stood; and suggest the necessity of your leaving Heatholiff with as little delay as possible."

"And you intend to marry Haidée—*you*, with this black crime on your conscience?" demanded Philip, looking at him with eyes that literally blazed in their passionate wrath.

"Certainly I do! Nothing in Heaven or earth is strong enough to prevent my marrying her!"

"Then, by Heaven, she shall learn the truth! and know you for the scoundrel you are!" exclaimed the artist, intensely excited, and totally ignoring the fact that it was his father he was addressing.

"You can tell her what you like! Nothing you say will separate us!" remarked Sir Jasper, with an evil smile, and in a voice of such calm power as carried with it a sense of conviction. "But with that you have nothing to do," he continued, changing his tone. "And I have not concluded all I have to say to you. Although I cannot openly acknowledge you as my son, I do not desire to ignore your claims,

["KEEP MY SECRET," SHE CRIED, "IMPOSE WHAT PENALTY YOU LIKE, ONLY SPARE ME PUBLIC SHAME."]

and, therefore, I have caused a deed to be drawn up, under which you will receive five hundred per annum; and further than this, I have, on your behalf, applied for a very lucrative Indian appointment under Government, which I have been fortunate enough to obtain and place at your disposal, so that, you see, a most brilliant future opens before you; and it only remains for you to avail yourself of it."

Philip rose and stood before him, his arms folded across his chest, his white face bearing on it traces of stern repression, and, strange to say, in that moment a striking and curious resemblence might have been traced between the two men.

"I thank you for your endeavours to further my interests," he said, in a voice of coldest, most incisive scorn; "but if I were a beggar in the street, not knowing where I should get my next meal—if I were starving of hunger, dying of thirst, perishing of cold—I would not accept any help you might offer me!"

Sir Jasper shrank back in his chair. Even his callous nature was not proof against the speaker's bitter contemptuous indignation.

"I have listened to what you have told me, and I have no resource but to believe it true. For what man would deliberately make himself out to be so heartless a scoundrel if he were not guilty of the conduct of which he is his own accuser? You deserted my mother—leaving her to die alone! You cared nothing of what became of your child—for aught you knew I might have been left to the mercies of a cruel world, and dragged up in a gutter to fill, in course of time, a felon's cell? This, thank Heaven, was averted by a good woman's kindness! But that it was so I owe no gratitude to you, and I feel none. It was, as you said, a strange Fate that brought me to this house; and I should intensely regret it but for one circumstance—a good action I have been enabled to perform this very day. I believe, after all, we are merely the playthings of a Destiny that does with us what it will, and at best we can only struggle against it—never conquer! However, you need be under no apprehensions of my troubling you, or even reminding you of my existence; for this night I shall leave Heathcliff Priors, and—if I can help it—shall never set foot within its doors again!"

The baronet drew a long breath—it might have been of relief.

"Very well. You are, of course, at perfect liberty to act as you like; all the same, I would point out that by refusing the appointment I offer you are playing the fool with your own interests!"

By this time he had quite regained his usual manner, and spoke with apparent indifference.

His listener took no notice of his remark, and he continued,—

"If I thought there was any chance of your taking my advice, I should say put your pride in your pocket, and go out to India, where you can begin a new life under the most favourable auspices, and where all the gifts of Fortune will be within your reach, if you are bold enough to climb and gather them. These heroic speeches"—shrugging his shoulders cynically—"are all very well in novels, where one naturally expects to find them. But real life is very different, as you will discover when you grow older—as I have discovered many years ago. Believe me, the one infallible rule by which men learn to regulate their conduct, their convictions—nay, their very feelings themselves is—*expediency!*"

He enunciated this easy, nonchalant philosophy, in which he himself was a devout believer, leaning back in his comfortable Russia leather-covered arm-chair, smoothing his black moustache with one slender, filbert-nailed finger, while he studied the pale, determined face opposite.

"Perhaps you are right. I do you the justice of feeling sure you practice the theory of which you are so eloquent an advocate!" responded the artist, with quiet satire; "but there is no chance of my ever becoming a convert to your opinions!"

"As you like. I cannot force you, however much I may desire it. But, at least, you will accept this?" taking up a cheque from the table and holding it out to him.

With a passionate gesture Philip snatched it from his hand, tore it in a dozen pieces, and flung them at his feet.

"That is my answer! The only one I shall vouchsafe to you!" he exclaimed, and, turning on his heel, left the room.

(To be continued.)

THE scar which an unkind word leaves upon a great love may be invisible, like that of great sin upon the tissues of the repentant soul; but for one as for the other, life has no healing.

THE truly strong and sound mind is the mind that can embrace equally great things and small. I would have a man great in great things and elegant in little things.

PLUCKING OSTRICH FEATHERS.—Some finesse is required in order that the bird selected for plucking may be approached and blindfolded with as little risk as possible. This is accomplished with the aid of a Chinaman, who is used as a bait to attract and concentrate the cussedness of the fowl, opportunity being taken while the brute is absorbed in his attempt to lay out the heathen, to slip the leg of a stocking over his head, which being done, he becomes practically harmless, and the operation of divesting him of his plumes can be proceeded with some degree of safety. Occasionally, however, the bird becomes restless under the operation, and struggles violently, when it becomes necessary to remove the blindfold and skip as nimbly as may be over the most adjacent portion of the fence.

[DE LAURNAY STOOD LIKE ONE PARALYSED AS JOHN FOLDED VIVIEN TO HIS HEART.]

NOVELETTE.]

A WIFE'S PERIL.

PART II.

CHAPTER VII.

A WELCOME VISITOR.

The east winds were howling wildly (like famished wolves let loose) round about the deserted parks and squares, and up and down Piccadilly, making London in March a dreary desert, a civilised and sparsely populated waste, for all wise folk remained within doors, ensconsed in the luxurious depths of cosy arm-chairs, wheeled close to playing fires.

But across the Channel life wore a vastly different aspect. Paris was gay and smiling, overcrowded and redolent of flowers, flooded by warm spring sunshine in the day, ablaze with electric lamps at night—always bright and brilliant—prodigal of joys and pleasures for those who sought a refuge within her hospitable walls from the winds, the weather, the troubles and cares of the bleak, wide world beyond.

"You think, then, the improvement is decided, and as rapid as can be expected, eh?" questioned Miss Prior of the tall, starched *medico* in a blue frock coat, as, holding his glossy hat with its deeply-curled brim in a gingerly fashion between his finger and thumb, the man of physic followed his patient's eldest daughter out of the Rector's chamber into a large, gorgeously-furnished private sitting-room of the Hotel Continentale.

Monsieur le Docteur replied, in the purest Parisian, that he had every cause to congratulate himself so far upon the effect of his treatment.

Monsieur's progress was marked, undoubted; whether hope might yet be entertained of the ultimate recovery of his sight, ah! that was another question *entirely*, to which time alone could reasonably be expected to make reply.

Meanwhile, could we not always hope? This blessed privilege, under all circumstances, still remained humanity's portion.

Finally, "Good morning, ladies! good morning!" Then as Vivien—who had been sitting thus far silent by the stove, with her head bent over her work—glanced up and returned the doctor's leave-taking, his professional eye lighted with much concern and stern disappointment upon the deathly pallor of Mrs. Staunton's ever-delicate cheeks; upon the languor of her once brilliant eyes, upon the wasted form and dejected air, which all too plainly told of anguish and of suffering—mental not less than physical.

Yet to the well-meant and anxious inquiries of Æsculapius Vivien returned the self-same stereotyped reply with which she was invariably wont to parry all inquiries.

"She was quite well! Nothing ailed her! All he—or any other—could do to serve her, and promote her comfort, was to leave her in peace, and—and not worry her!"

Yet "one little word" the good man whispered into Miss Prior's ear at parting—a word which disquieted Josephine to no ordinary degree—for as she glanced at Vivien's altered features and shrunken form she seemed to read confirmation sure of the doctor's ominous warning, written in characters clear and unmistakable upon the lineaments she held the dearest in the world.

"She has the air—Madame, your sister—of one who departs!" the oracle had murmured, with a significant elevation of his brows and shoulders and one long-nailed digit, pointing emphatically heavenwards, as though to denote that to the professional eye the incipient signs of sprouting wings were already palpably apparent. "Have a care, Mademoiselle, lest she escapes us unawares! For my part, I would sooner insure Monsieur, your father's life!"

But Vivien continued to protest almost fretfully that she was well enough—far better than she *cared* to be!

Surely life was scarce worth living (she, at any rate, was weary of the farce), much less making such a fuss and fame about? Only "let her be!"

"Well, I shall feel it my duty to call John's attention to your white face and your evident loss of strength!" Josephine returned, in decisive tones.

Albeit, inwardly she quaked, for John Staunton's name in these days was rarely mentioned between the sisters, and she was doubtful as to the effect her words might probably produce.

"John!" Vivien echoed, bitterly, with curling lip and flashing eyes, momentarily reminding Josie of the sister she sometimes felt constrained to mourn as dead. "John? Do you think it would seriously disquiet him to learn I was slowly, surely 'drifting awa' to the land o' the leal'? Do you suppose he would so far relax or unbend from his attitude of outraged virtue and righteous indignation as to affect an interest he does not *feel* in the health of the wretched woman who is in *name* his wife? the living log, to whom he is bound by law; that clog upon his movements and worldly advancement, from which he yet is impotent to effect escape through the horror of what he terms 'public exposure and esclandre!' You do John Staunton grave injustice, Josie, if you deem him thus pitifully weak! I should have thought you knew my husband, as well as I your brother-in-law; and knowing him, could not so grievously have misjudged him as to suppose it possible he——"

"Vivien! Vivien! now, as ever, 'tis *you* who cruelly misjudge John! *You* who wrong the best and noblest man who ever lived! Think how sorely he has been tried! through how terribly fierce an ordeal of suffering he has passed! And yet, since—since the hour of your reconciliation, has he ever murmured *one* reproach?

Has he once upbraided or reminded you of—of the horror of the past?"

"No," Vivien retorted, swiftly, with flashing eyes, "because he has been too callous and too cold! As he explained to me then (you know when I mean," and involuntarily the poor girl shuddered at the recollections her own words evoked), "he allowed me to resume my place, in order to spare a dying man (we all thought father's days were numbered then), in order to save his own honour, to shield his own name from publicity and disgrace! Those were his motives! He made no secret of them."

"If you and I stood alone together upon this earth, Vivien" (those were his very words), "you would be henceforth *dead* to me in actual fact—dead as all remembrance of your duty towards the absent must have been, when—ah! why recapitulate all that?" she broke off, shivering; for, in truth, she lacked courage to repeat the bitter, fateful words which should more recall all too vividly the tragic, terrible past. "But I am not complaining," she went on, wearily. "No doubt I have not suffered even yet, according to my actual deserts; only—only I would far sooner he had struck me, reviled me, *murdered* me then and there, rather than have cemented this hollow peace, which is slowly torturing me to death!"

It was not often she spoke thus unreservedly to that generous-hearted sister, whom for so many years wilful, wayward Vivien had so cruelly and wantonly misjudged.

Small wonder, then, that Josephine was positively startled by the fierce emphasis with which this low-toned diatribe was delivered by the white lips which so rarely now gave voice to aught beyond the merest stereotyped commonplaces.

"Dearest," she whispered, drawing nearer, "let me tell John that you suffer from his coldness and indifference! Give him some sign *yourself* that you are contrite, that——"

"Contrite! who says that I am contrite?" Vivien echoed, angrily. "Who imagines that I—a woman—shall condescend to the meanness of suing for a man's love? Nay, I have been wont to see suppliants prone at *my* feet! to *accede*, not to petition! And if, indeed, I am at times haunted by vain and bitter regrets, they are, believe me, because of—of frustrated hopes, because of possibilities blighted! I *might* have been so happy! I might have——"

"Vivien, Vivien! you do not realise the meaning of the wicked words you utter! You were mercifully snatched from sin, like a brand plucked from the burning—rescued——"

"Won Inglesh gentelmans!" gravely announced the *garçon* (advertised to "speak Englesh") throwing open the door at this juncture, and advancing towards Miss Prior, bearing a card upon a salver. "Hee inquyre weaffer——"

"Sir Archibald Hope!" Josephine exclaimed, as she raised the pasteboard, a warm flush mounting to her very temples, a glad light dawning in her eyes. "Oh! how pleased papa will be! Show the gentleman up, Armand, and ——"

"Ah! let me first escape!" cried Vivien, starting to her feet. "I—I could not bear to meet Sir Archie! His very name is hateful to me, associated as it is with the most terrible memories of my life!"

So when the baronet was ushered in Josephine stood alone, smiling, blushing (as he bent almost double over her white hand), declaring in one breath "how very pleased" she was to see him, in the next inquiring "what on earth had induced him to come?"

"Well, Paris is the refuge of the—the aimless, the purposeless, the indolent of earth!" Sir Archibald protested, evasively, he threw himself upon the crimson satin fauteuil indicated by his hostess. "And I—well, I'd got sick of my grandmother's place up in the Highlands. London just now is neither more nor less than a howling wilderness. Westlands represents the abomination of desolation; with all the rectory blinds down, and — and so — well, as I'd nothing better to do, I thought—don't you know—oh, you understand! That failing any more serious object in life for the moment, I'd—well, I might as well run across the Channel and see what was going on *à Paris*, having friends there too!" he added, significantly, essaying a short laugh, intended to round this slightly involved period airily, but which signally failed to accomplish his purpose; for even to his own ear it sounded so forced and strained that its only effect was to add materially to the unusual embarrassment under which Sir Archie momentarily laboured.

Josephine, feeling her own heart flutter strangely, considerately glanced aside, took up the *Figaro*, looked for the paper-knife, and in due course proceeded (with surely unnecessary care) to cut its flimsy pages.

Then, after a few conventional remarks, Sir Archie laid his hat and cane aside, assumed his normal *debonair* manner, and conversation drifted naturally in due course into less artificial channels.

The young man rejoiced unfeignedly to hear of the good Rector's restoration to comparative health and strength; his eyesight for the present was entirely lost, however, concussion of the brain having left him completely blind. Hopes were, nevertheless, still entertained of his ultimate recovery of the use of his left eye, at any rate; and it was in order to consult a celebrated Parisian oculist, Josephine explained, that the family from Westlands had taken up their quarters at the Hotel Continentale.

"I say 'family' advisedly," she added, laughing. "For we are all here, you know—the whole strength of the company! Papa can scarcely bear Vivien's absence for an hour. It seems that when there was some idea—in the summer, if you remember—of Mrs. Staunton's joining her husband out in Nicaragua, the notion of a possible separation from his favourite child preyed sadly on the old man's mind, although he never permitted himself to confess as much, for we both thought—er—humph!—that it would have been *wiser* perhaps for her to go! So whilst he lay delirious the terrible dread possessed him that Vivien had sailed for the New World, and that he should never see her more. His ravings and regrets were indescribably painful, and made such an impression upon my sister, that ever since his recovery it has been a matter of some difficulty to induce her to stir from his side. *My* place, naturally, is likewise there; and as John has business with which he could occupy himself in France, he decided to come with us rather than be stranded at home alone; so we emigrated in a body, as you see; and really the change, and this wonderful doctor's *régime*, have done papa such an immensity of good that we can only congratulate ourselves on having made the move!"

"And Mr. and Mrs. Staunton? Forgive the point-blank question, my dear Miss Prior; but after having been so intimately associated with you in your hour of trouble, it would now be folly for me to attempt to ignore all knowledge of the past, particularly," he added in a lower voice, and with a world of meaning in his eyes, "as I am deeply interested—necessarily so—in all which concerns the welfare of those dear to *you*!"

Josephine's heart beat strangely. Involuntarily she glanced aside.

What meant that strange expression in his eyes?—the tremulous intonation of his voice? Ah! she dared not attempt to analyse, still less did she venture to hope.

She had been so cruelly disappointed and disillusionised more than once, poor girl, that she had come to believe at length that her path henceforth through life was to lay for ever through the narrow, sandy-beaten tracks of duty—never along that fragrant, devious "primrose path," where roses bloom and the mavis and the thrush carol, and even the sunshine hath a peculiar radiance born of the ambient atmosphere of love!

"I know not what to say of them!" she answered, mournfully. "John acted nobly, so at least it seemed to me; and from the hour when Vivien and he entered the rectory together no allusion to the past, she tells me, has ever passed his lips. After you left them at the Alexandra it seems a terribly painful scene ensued. John told her that, for my father's and for all our sakes, she should resume her former place in this household; but that from that moment his *wife* was dead to him as though she lay buried in her grave! And dead to him *as* wife, Vivien assures me, she ever since has been. John is cruelly, fatally 'kind,' if you can understand me; kind as a brother, polite as a friend, ostentatiously *attentive*, but alas! only as man to woman—with a supreme indifference over all, which in another I should say amounted to absolute apathy, so callous, hard, and *frozen*, his manner has become! It seems difficult to realize that those two were ever *lovers*, much less that they must still remain indissolubly united till the end—husband and wife till 'death do them part!'"

"Sad, most sad," the Baronet returned, musingly. "Yet they are both still so young that you must not lose heart and hope entirely, Miss Prior; something sooner or later *must* startle them out of this unnatural frame of mind, and put an end to a completion of affairs as unendurable as abnormal, take my word for that."

"Ha! you do not understand John!" Josephine replied, with a despairing sigh. "He seems made of iron; his resolution once taken is unalterable! I, who *know* how passionate was his attachment to my sister, find myself looking at him sometimes, and wondering if it is *possible* if he ever loved his wife! For the traces of mental suffering, anguish, misery, are all so plainly depicted on her lovely face, that even a stranger gazing at her, it seems to me, must feel his heart moved to pity, interest, sympathy with the unknown sorrows of one so pathetically beautiful; so hopeless, yet so young! How John can spend his life with her, and ignore all that is written on her features; all that her weary voice, her languid movements, her dejected mien convey, is *more* than I can understand. I am free to confess that there come moments when I myself feel as though—as though I should absolutely grow to *hate* him," she added, lowering her voice mysteriously, and clasping her hands with a faint involuntary shudder, "because of this stolid, unmoved calm; even though I firmly believe him the best and truest-hearted man on earth!"

This painful interview was abruptly terminated by the entrance of Mr. Prior's valet. The convalescent had heard from Vivien of the arrival of the baronet, and now sent to inquire whether Sir Archibald were charitably disposed to bestow an hour of his leisure in beguiling the tedium of the afternoon for his old friend.

It is needless to add that the young man rose with alacrity to obey this summons, and that he was henceforth a daily—sometimes, indeed, almost an *hourly*—visitor, to that noble suite of apartments occupied by "de familie Englesh" (we quote Armand), located in those sweet spring days at the Hôtel Continentale.

CHAPTER VIII.

AN AUDACIOUS GUEST.

VIVIEN sat alone by the gorgeous gilded stove, one dull afternoon, some few days later. Sir Archibald had called an hour earlier to take the Rector for a drive in the Bois; but Josephine only had accompanied the gentlemen. Vivien, pleading headache and disinclination for the daily *rarae-show*, had been reluctantly left to solitude.

"A visitor for me, Armand?" she echoed, wearily, as the ubiquitous *garçon* bowed low, and presented a foreign-looking card. "Le Comte de Chambri! I don't know the name! Someone for Monsieur Staunton probably. Say my husband is not at home."

"But non—oh Madame bout excuse—'twas de *ladie* Monsieur demanted—Madame Staun-

ton—oh! quyte sure, *quyte!* Nea misstak' at all—'twas *Française* Monsieur spoke—impossible, therefore, two mak' *erreur!*"

"Show him up then, Armand," Vivien returned; and even as the words left her lips, just as Armand's rusty black figure was disappearing behind the *portière*, the curtain was flung back, and the unexpected visitor glided noiselessly into the room.

A bitter cry escaped Vivien's lips, as she started to her feet.

"Gaston!—is it possible?"

"More—it is a fact!" returned that hero, bowing low; and even as he raised his head, and drew himself up to his full height, Vivien was startled—nay, absolutely horrified—to note the extraordinary change so brief a time had effected in his outer man; for De Laurnay appeared unnaturally gaunt and aged. He was, moreover, clothed in deepest mourning, which rendered the ghastly pallor of his complexion terribly apparent; his eyes were sunken beneath his dark overhanging brows; there was not a superfluous ounce of flesh on his bones, upon which his well-cut garments hung loose and shapeless, as though they served to drape a rail. The metamorphis was sufficiently significant and appalling. Vivien involuntarily recoiled, as much conscience-stricken as alarmed, perhaps, at that first moment of recognition of the man who had exercised so fatal an influence over her lifelong fate.

"Ah! you do well to shudder at sight of me—Nemesis in the flesh! If I held a flaming sword or a poisoned dagger in my hand, Madame, you could scarcely feel amazed!"

"*Nothing* would amaze me, sir, on the part of one," Vivien returned, icily, drawing up her slender figure to the utmost, and steadfastly returning De Laurnay's gaze, for there was an undercurrent of menace in his voice which acted as a spur to slumbering indignation, and bade pride arm itself at every point, "who is unmanly enough to intrude, under cover of a feigned name, into the presence of——"

"Hold there!" he interrupted, imperiously, pointing to the card; "this is my rightful name and title. Through the death of a distant relative I have succeeded to the estates in Picardy, and henceforth I am Comte de Chambri!"

Vivien bowed her head in token of mute acquiescence; then, after a moment's pause, seeing that he uttered no further word, she inquired, calmly,—

"And what, may I venture to ask, does Monsieur the Comte de Chambri demand of me?"

For one moment still he paused, an expression so ferocious momentarily gathering in his eyes, whilst he ground his teeth beneath the shadow of his dark moustache, and impotently clenched both bloodless hands, that even Vivien's brave heart quailed. She had been prepared from the onset for reproaches, recrimination, invective and abuse; but this—this nameless "something" which she beheld hovering ominously on Gaston's brow, made her very blood run cold within her veins, her pulses cease to throb.

"*You* dare to ask me that? What I demand of you? The fulfilment of your promise, woman—your promise to share my life! the restitution of my shattered peace, and hopes, and happiness—my vanished joy in every day calm, quiet, and content? Of all of these you have robbed me, Vivien. I come, now, to demand them back again from those white, cruel hands!"

"Gaston!" she cried, momentarily moved to weakness by the piteous break in his voice; "surely you know not, or you momentarily forget, *who* I am, and *where* we are? You are in John Staunton's rooms—you are using strange, unpardonable language to his wife ——"

He interrupted her by a hoarse, fiendish laugh, which rasped her delicate ear. He seized her by one slender wrist, and held it as in a red hot vice, which seemed to sear her flesh,—gazing the while down into her face with an expression upon his own which haunted Vivien strangely in the years ahead, which surely, to her dying day, she may never more forget.

"Forget, do I? even as *you* forgot when you fled from the danger of meeting *him* to the haven of my arms! No, Vivien, believe me, only when breath fails me shall I cease to remember that you are in truth John Staunton's wife. Have you not robbed my days of happiness, my nights of peace?—the sunshine of all warmth for me, the flowers of fragrance, spring of joy? Ah! have you not wrecked and maimed my life, and made me the wretched, hopeless, helpless thing you see before you now? This being so, dare you ask me whether I forget!"

"Gaston! Gaston!" she fairly wailed, flinging her arms aloft one moment only to wring her hands the next in impotent despair; "these wild and futile words avail you nought; for Heaven's sake be calm! All I meant was to remind you of where we *are*, of who I *am*, that—that my *husband* at any moment might return, and Heaven help us both if—if John should find you here!"

"You cannot think I fear him—that white-livered Englishman who could voluntarily cross the seas, leaving his bride behind? His must be a well regulated mind indeed; he will pause to consider, weigh his words, arrange his plans of actions well. He would be prudent, cautious, no matter how, when or where he may meet his deadliest foe, or what the provocation he received. Phaugh! a fig for your legal lord and master! I care not how soon he appears upon the scene! You will be so good, madame, as to present me to him when *Mr.* Staunton arrives."

"Gaston! are you mad?" she gasped, startled into protest by the calmness and decision with which these last words were uttered. "Present *you* to my husband? How is that possible? and—and to what end? If even ——"

"You will introduce the Comte de Chambri!" he returned, deliberately, but with an air of sullen menace, as he once more took up the card and flipped it with the thumb and forefinger of one hand, the while he held it gingerly in the other. "The *name* will be unfamiliar as the *man* to Monsieur, your husband. Say I am a friend of—whom you will, that matters little. To what end? You question why. That I may have the felicity of visiting you *often*, there and then. My rooms adjoin your own, madame—one balcony skirts both (which overlook the courtyard only, as you have perhaps observed). You are frequently alone, I know. Your husband is *generally* absent, and often, as to-day. I watch your sister and your father roll off from the door in a carriage together on such occasions——"

"Coward!" she hissed, fiercely, between her teeth. "So you think to scare and intimidate a helpless, unprotected woman? The threat is worthy of—of your nationality, worthy of——"

"Scare! Intimidate! Who used such terms? The insinuation is your own, madame—not mine. Did I 'scare' you in those bright June days not so long gone by, when we sat together beneath the trees and whispered words of love? Did I 'intimidate' you when you confessed to me that you *dared* not meet the husband you had *grown* to fear, and had *never* really loved? When you admitted you preferred to share life and banishment with me rather than remain to endure the caresses of the man whose name you were doomed to bear? That time is not so long gone by, Vivien—my memory, perchance, is better than your own. But recollect that since that fatal day, when you, or some other, played me false, you have vouchsafed no explanation of your conduct; you have given neither sign of penitence nor token of remembrance. My own letters returned to me unopened—directed in your husband's hand—are the only communications of any sort I have, since that fateful hour, received either from him or you. I waited for his challenge—I waited for your call; neither came, and I am here to know whether—as I have every reason to conclude—your sentiments towards me remain unchanged? You *loved* me, Vivien, *once*; that much I cannot doubt; and—as I am unconscious of having done aught since those happy days to forfeit your regard, I venture to lay the flattering unction of my soul that you love me *still!* It is, therefore, in our joint interests, and not by any means in the distinguished rôle your words imply, that I am here to-day. Present me to your husband, and I——"

"But, Josephine—my father!" Vivien gasped, terrified by his manner into some faint endeavour to temporise. "They would recognize you at once, of course, and——"

"Your father is blind, and as for your sister—well, if mademoiselle prove indiscreet, so much the better for my purpose. If she betrays me, and your husband fails to avail himself of the privilege of challenging *me*, why, as a matter of course, I shall embrace an early opportunity of challenging *him!* when the issue, I believe, to be a foregone conclusion. I am one of the best shots in Europe, and shall have the honour of sending a bullet through Monsieur your husband's heart!"

"Gaston, you are mad!" she cried, blanched to the very lips. "Be merciful and—ah! Heaven! I hear voices even now upon the stairs—my father!—John!—oh! Heavens, fly! Monsieur De Laurnay, I beseech——"

"You will present the *Comte de Chambri* to your husband, madam," he interrupted, in low, stern tones, fixing upon her a resolute gaze, which chilled her very heart's blood. "Should you fail to do this, Gaston De Laurnay will be proud and happy to avenge the indignity he has suffered by shooting Monsieur John Staunton like a dog!"

Before she could reply the velvet *portière* was pushed aside and the Rector entered on his son-in-law's arm, laughing and chattering with more than his usual volubility. "Vivien—ha! I know you're there, we heard your voice a moment ago; and—whom have you found to beguile the tedium of your solitude? Well, you must know we stumbled across this 'man' of yours just by the Place de la Concorde, so he charitably undertook to see me home in order to set those other miscreants free! Ha! ha! they've stolen off on foot along the Bois—bound, they declared, for the Cascade! Now it strikes me (for I can see farther through a stone wall than most men, let me tell you—although for the time being they call me blind!) that Sir Archie and Miss Josie—— But ha! by-the-bye, whom have we here? It will be well that I should know, my dear, before I was indiscreet!"

The room was of vast dimensions, and John had been carefully conducting the invalid towards his couch in the accustomed corner, whilst the old man rambled on.

Now for the first time he glanced towards his wife and her visitor, for Vivien and De Laurnay still stood motionless side by side.

One swift, appealing glance she shot towards the Comte indescribably pathetic, mutely beseeching as that which momentarily flashes from the glazing eyes of the hunted hare when the dogs are already at her throat; but Gaston stood stern, relentless, and immobile as some grim statue wrought in bronze. Only his nostril quivered slightly, his brows elevated themselves one hair's breadth; otherwise he made no sign.

Vivien's heart turned sick and cold.

"Monsieur le Comte de Chambri, papa," she faltered; "a—a friend of Sir Archibald Hope. He does not speak English."

This with an eloquent gesture towards De Laurnay, who all too quickly grasped the one—"so——"

"You will forgive my saying good-day and good-bye in one breath, gentlemen," he supplemented in French. "Madame, your most humble servitor! With your permission I—withdraw."

And with a low bow Gaston vanished as both Englishmen politely inclined their heads.

"Humph!" said the Rector, as the *portière* fell back, "his voice seems immensely familiar, though as my acquaintance among aristocrats is limited, I suppose monsieur the Count and I have *not* met before."

"Are you very tired after your drive, dear papa?" Vivien murmured, with difficulty finding voice. "I—ah, let me arrange the cushions behind your head. So! That is better, is it not? John, will you kindly ring the bell? I think we should all be glad of tea."

John gave vent to his low rare laugh as he instantaneously complied.

"I should not advise your endeavouring to keep the kettle boiling until the return of 'the rest of the Royal Family,'" he declared, facetiously. "If I know anything of human nature, I read something in Hope's eyes, about an hour or so ago, which plainly conveyed it was *not* solely in order to admire the artificial beauties of the Cascade that he was so very solicitous Josephine should walk with him through the Bois this afternoon. However, we shall see *what* we shall see, as the poet says. Armand, let us have tea at once—*à l'Anglaise*, of course."

CHAPTER IX.

BREAKERS AHEAD.

But very few hours sufficed to prove John Staunton's right to claim credit for a perspicacity he had not hitherto enjoyed, for before the lights were extinguished in the hotel that night Sir Archibald Hope had duly asked and received Mr. Prior's benediction and paternal sanction to make Josephine Lady Hope at no very distant date.

The projected alliance was one calculated to inspire unmitigated satisfaction in every breast, so for the next few days an atmosphere of unusual hilarity and content not unnaturally pervaded that gorgeously furnished "flat," which the Rector facetiously designated "Westlands-super-France."

Every face was radiant with hope, content, and happiness, save that of John Staunton's wife; she alone remained grave to absolute melancholy, white, wan, and obviously preoccupied. The bridegroom elect had seized upon some opportune moment to pass his arm through Staunton's, and murmer confidentially that, as he was so soon to be admitted as a member of the family, he hoped it would not be regarded as unpardonably premature if he presumed so far upon coming events as to protest that he felt personally uneasy and disquieted when he glanced towards Vivien's still beautiful, though now drawn and haggard face.

Josephine too (blushing under the weight of new-blown honours) made bold to approach a theme which she had not dared to broach for long months past, and earnestly besought John to try what solicitude and tenderness might effect, implored him to relax and unbend a tride, and note the influence his changed demeanour might exercise upon his most unhappy wife.

John scowled darkly.

"Am I not already sufficiently humiliated and abased? Do I not shelter and clothe, feed, and protect a woman whom, like some untutored savage, I captured by strategy, and retained by physical force? Vivien is no unsophisticated creature; she is of the world worldly, and knows full well the relative value of position and disgrace. Think, then, how she—she must have *loved* that foreign scoundrel before she would voluntarily have resigned all the best things, and the sweets of existence, in order to share his life. From shame and ignominy I rescued her, 'tis true. Yet I tore her from the man she loved; on this score I pity and commiserate her—for her misery is obvious; she will never be again the light-hearted woman that she was. She is doomed to suffer all the pangs and pains of a hopeless passion; and is, moreover, bound to endure the constant infliction of my companionship. This (for her own sake) I am powerless to obviate, yet I can, at least, be generous enough to spare her unwelcome caresses, protestations of an affection she has ceased to reciprocate, and all those airs of tender proprietorship, which however precious as pledges of mutual affection, must be galling as fetters and shackles of bondage to the heart which has grown cold and insensible, and no longer throbs responsive to the accents which were formerly as music to the ear. No, duty towards both Vivien and myself *obliges* me to plant myself 'twixt her and what she regards as happiness. This is bad enough; do not ask me to torture her still further, for to a woman who loves one man nought is so intolerable as the devotion of another!"

In answer to this bitter outburst Josephine had never a word to say.

It seemed to her, moreover, that John *was* right (as ever), kind, generous, and noble, now that she understood his motives in observing this distant attitude towards his erring wife; for Vivien was, without doubt, still mourning her deprivation of a lover for whose sake she had so evidently deemed the world itself well lost.

So she held her peace, merely murmuring a hope that John would do his best to induce her hapless sister to take that daily exercise and relaxation of which her white, wan face surely testified she stood in urgent need.

"Remember, John, she has not had a single hour's change or pleasure since—since the day of your return; whilst constant attendance on papa, and incarceration in a sick room, have necessarily told heavily upon her once buoyant temperament. Suppose, now, you suggest, John, dear—you, yourself—in your prettiest tones, and with your most insinuating air"—here Josephine smiled archly, and shot a shy glance at her brother-in law's stern and rigid face—"that Vivien should let you take her to the ball at the Embassy to-morrow evening—No, *not* by any manner of means to join Archie and myself. We shall have quite enough to do to look after one another, and can't undertake the chaperonage of another man's wife! You must go yourself, of course. A quartette makes a charming party, but who can imagine anything more miserable than a *trio* at a ball Take Vivien, John, and see if your heart does not thrill with joy and pride when you hear her pronounced—as she will be, of course—the *belle par excellence* of the room! It is the first favour, dear, I have ever asked of you; and, John—little as you guess it—I have borne far more than you imagine for *your* sake!"

Thus pathetically appealed to, John, after one moment's irresolution, decided that he had no choice but to comply, and scarce an hour later, saw (to his own amaze) Vivien's white face brighten, and her eyes momentarily dilate, as she answered in a low voice, that if her husband "wished it," certainly it would afford her the greatest possible pleasure to accompany him, Sir Archie, and Josie to the long-talked of Embassy-ball.

John chanced to stand perilously near his wife whilst this brief dialogue proceeded, and as she shot one swift, sidelong glance up into his eyes, with something of the resistless coquetry of old, her sweet face flushing rosy red one moment only to grow white as snow the next, an almost irresistible inclination was strong just then upon him to gather in his arms the lovely creature he held so dear, and clasping her tightly to his breast, beseech her to examine well the innermost depths of her heart of hearts, and tell him, once for all, whether some latent spark of love for him did not linger there—a spark which unceasing effort on his part might yet, perchance, fan into a blaze once more.

For ah! in truth, he would be all content to serve, like Jacob of old, seven years—and seven uncomplainingly—cheered by the mere hope of that ultimate guerdon for which his whole soul so ardently yearned!

But then Vivien chanced to bend her head again over the lace-work in her hand; it seemed to John her lips grew stern—her brow clouded, so—with a sigh—he turned away.

His heart just then in truth throbbed wildly, his brain whirled, his pulses beat too madly to admit of his lingering another moment on that perilous vantage ground; he might betray himself and harass her before he could recover self-control.

Yet though John Staunton seized his hat and hurried out—down the sunny, crowded streets leading to the wide and bustling Avenue de l'Opera—with a sudden mist before his eyes, a bitter, burning lump in his throat, and his breath coming in short, quick gasps, methinks his heart was lighter than it had been for many a long day past, for a glow of hope—no matter of how evanescent a nature—now gilded the horizon like a rosy streak, counselling courage and a brave heart to the man, who, for long months had been "sickening of that vague disease" which mortals call despair.

Vivien would be all his own once more, if only for a few brief hours. She would lean upon his arm, she would look up into his face, her sweet eyes would meet his own, and therein surely she would not fail to read the tragic secret he hugged so close—the secret of his hopeless love, his anguish, his remorse? for in these days, he told himself, that if he had never left his fair young wife alone the life-long fate of both, most probably, would have been far otherwise.

If she smiled upon him, he would so far unbend as to ask her for a waltz; then his arm would encircle the slender waist he so often longed to clasp; her heart would beat near his own, her sweet breath fan his cheek! This prospect seemed to John well-nigh too full of perilous bliss—perilous, because after a glimpse of Heaven he would all too surely find himself, but a few brief hours later, shivering disconsolately once more outside the gates of Paradise picturing the unattainable joys within.

Nevertheless, for the time being, he walked on air. Paris had never seemed to him so gay and brilliant, the sun so warm, the sky so blue, humanity itself so lovable as during the course of this morning's walk!

He went into the first florist's in the Rue de la Paix, and ordered the choicest bouquet money could command—Parma violets and lilies-of-the-valley, stephanotis and maiden-hair. Vivien was so fond of flowers, and should the belle of the ball be minus a nose-gay? Pah! the notion was preposterous, absurd; and—oh! would to-day *never* wear away!? Would to-morrow night *ever* come?

Ha! all too soon for your peace of mind, John Staunton—as you were speedily destined to discover!

He found Sir Archie in the *salon* upon his return to the hotel, chatting with the Rector, who was unusually loquacious after an excellent lunch, and more pleased than he cared to admit to hear that his younger daughter had been prevailed upon to accede to her husband's wish, and was now busily making preparations for the ball with some show of natural feminine assiduity and interest, in the relative merits of tulle illusion, and Gloire de Dijon roses, cream satin and point lace.

Although every painful detail connected with Vivien's flight and providential rescue from perdition (thanks to Sir Archie's timely interference and audacious ruse) had been successfully hushed up, so that not a suspicion of the hideous truth had ever crossed the Rector's mind, yet paternal instinct had long since whispered that all was not well between the daughter so tenderly beloved and the husband with whom she had been so recently re-united.

Mr. Prior had discussed the subject more than once with Josephine, questioned Vivien, tenderly, and continually "sounded" John; but, individually and collectively, they had assured him that there was nothing "seriously amiss," counselling "patience," and non-interference, and now already it seemed to the anxious father the turn of the tide had come.

That his younger daughter's marriage had not turned out a more signal success, was a source of constant and deep-rooted regret to the good Rector, who, moreover, unjustly reproached himself for having urged Vivien to make too precipitate a choice of for no worse or better reason than that it had appeared to him the woman who was privileged to share John Staunton's life must perforce have before her as fair a prospect of unmixed happiness as mortal wife dare hope for here below, where matrimonial bliss now-a-days is a commodity inestimably precious in just proportion to its rarity.

But now that "John and the child" were going to a ball together, in a rational, comfortable fashion, this first step in the right direction seemed like a presage of better things to follow, and the Rector's heart swelled high with hope and gratification.

They would catch the sweet infection surely from Sir Archie and Josephine, and starting soberly as husband and wife, return perchance mutually re-enamoured like newly-plighted lovers.

"Yes, a lovely morning, and the Boulevards crammed," John declared, in cheery tones, advancing towards the gleaming stove, and taking up his stand upon the hearthrug in the proverbial attitude of "the Englishman at home," with his back to the place where the fire *ought* to have been. "No, I saw nothing of Josephine—which is strange, if she is shopping, as you say, in the Rue de la Paix; but *such* a stream of fashionable folk! Gracious me! Damon might easily pass within half a foot of Pythia's elbow and yet remain unrecognized—the scene is so bewildering. I'll tell you, by-the-way, whom I met down by the Louvre—that fellow you introduced to me, Vivien, Comte de Chambri, don't you know?—a friend of Sir Archibald's, you said, I think? and an uncommonly nice fellow."

"Comte de Chambri, a friend of *mine!*" the Baronet echoed, vaguely. "Why, I don't ——"

But Vivien glanced up quickly, arresting the tell-tale words upon his lips with a swift, agonised glance. John was standing behind her, so this significant gesture escaped him, and he paused with a smile upon his lips, mute interrogation in his eyes, until Sir Archibald should conclude his sentence.

"Well, o'd man? You don't——"

"Eh—what? Oh, of course! I was only going to say, don't you know, that I—I didn't recall the name at the moment—all these foreign titles sound so much alike. What sort of fellow may he be?"

"Devilish good-looking, though decidedly 'a foot-in-the-grave young man.' 'Greenery-yallery,' too, to boot, for he's about the colour of parchment. I asked him if he'd been laid up, or was suffering still from any particular malady, for he looks as much like a corpse as a living creature can, and has nothing but skin upon his bones!"

"Ha—dear me! Just so!" Sir Archie acquiesced, vaguely, prompted by Vivian's eloquent eyes, and much disquieted by the seared expression of her bloodless face. "Think I remember now who you mean. Haven't seen him for an age, though. We were boys together, and—and all that sort of thing!" he concluded, airily, with a complacent sense of having acquitted himself far more creditably in so difficult an emergency than a man could reasonably be expected to do.

"He took me into the Cércle de l'Union, of which it seems he is a member; and very comfortably the fellows there are located, I can assure you. Might fancy oneself in St. James's! We had a glass of Madeira, looked at the papers, and smoked a cigarette together. I happened to mention we were going to the Embassy to-night, Vivien, and be at once arranged to meet us there. Uncommonly good-natured I call it; for of course I was explaining to him that we scarcely know a soul. *He* knows all the best set seemingly, so I thought you girls would be glad. *Toujour perdrix* is a lamentable fate. Josephine, a feel sure, will be grateful for a change of partners(er—humph!)whereas if a married woman is to dance with her husband only she might almost as well stay at home, according to Parisian tenets. Oh, Vivien! don't I deserve a vote of thanks?"

Vivien smiled faintly, and responded in a tremulous tone, that she began to feel as though her dancing days were almost over. "Oh! come, I say now!" Sir Archibald protested gallantly—which vague asservation answered the purpose intended; for it sufficed, at any rate, to divert the conversation into less perilous channels.

For the expression of Vivien's white wan face effectually betrayed to one and all that they were drifting surely towards verbal quicksands, and that the next word or look or sentence might prove irretrievably fatal.

But just at this juncture Josephine entered, all smiles and excitement, and parcels and chatter; she had bought the cheapest gloves that ever were seen, and—"Vivien child! if only Worth does with your satin and lace *half* that he says, your toilette will be a marvel!" she protested, turning towards her sister.

Thus the danger was momentarily averted, and the looming rock ahead temporarily evaded. Mrs. Staunton drew breath more freely, for, truth to tell, Sir Archie, in the excitement and rapture attendant upon matutinal greetings with Josephine, had become happily oblivious of the threatened *contretemps*, and his curiosity even slumbered.

CHAPTER X.

A TERRIBLE SUSPICION.

TOWARDS seven o'clock the following evening, John Staunton and Sir Archie, strolling arm-in-arm down the Boulevard des Capucins, become to a full stop before one of those innumerable kiosks sacred to the sale of newspapers and cigarettes, with which the main thoroughfares of Paris are studded as lavishly as Regent-street with lamp-posts.

The ladies had been more or less invisible to the naked eye (as the baronet protested with a genuine sense of grievance) ever since the mid-day meal. And no wonder, for the notion of the ball had been so hastily proposed and carried that there was a variety of minor toilette details requiring "personal supervision;"—so Josie had candidly informed her exigeant admirer at luncheon that she infinitely preferred his absence to his presence "on this occasion only," and would consequently feel obliged if he would "take himself and John out of the way" until precisely ten minutes before the hour at which the brougham was ordered to be in waiting before the doors of the Continentale.

So the two men had been killing time all the afternoon as ingeniously and industriously as their individual "conditions" would permit; though, to confess the truth, both husband and lover were more than ordinary excited and perturbed, each man furtively regarding his watch from time to time with more of restless anticipation and impatience than either would perhaps have cared to admit or been in a position to explain.

"Look alive, Hope!" John exclaimed, suddenly, for the baronet was vacillating 'twixt the conflicting merits of *Figaro* and *Le Petit Journal pour Rire*, whilst his friend, turning his back upon the kiosk, was complacently smoking a cigarette, and absently regarding the ebb and flow of pedestrians up and down both sides of the brilliantly-lighted boulevard in one continuous stream. "There's that fellow Chambri on the opposite side of the way. Let's follow him up and overtake him. Sharp's the word! I want to——"

"Where, old man—where?"

"Ah, he's come to anchor—speaking to a man just outside the Café Americaine, don't you see? White flower in his coat, and—— Good Heavens, Archie! have you seen a ghost? For Heaven's sake, man alive, say quickly what's amiss?"

For the baronet had fiercely grasped John Staunton's arm, and for one long moment literally gasped for breath.

"What did you say his name was?" he questioned, hoarsely, gazing wildly up at John. "Where did you meet him? And who—*who* did you say presented him to you as—as my friend?"

"Chambri—Comte de Chambri! Surely you should know the name? He was calling upon my wife one day at the Continentale, and she introduced him as—— But, for pity's sake, man alive, tell me at once if there's anything wrong! I—I can't understand why you look so scared. I suppose there's nothing to *fear*——"

"The worst!" Hope answered, hoarsely, clutching the other's arm. "It would be cruel kindness to prevaricate. In *such* a crisis the truth surely must be best. At any rate, I—I could not justify to my own conscience concealment in a matter involving issues so momentous" (for even as he spoke there rose up before him, all too vivid, a remembrance of Vivien's white face of agonised entreaty when, upon mention of the Comte's name, he, Sir Archie, had shown symptoms of repudiating the supposition that de Chambri was his friend). "That man is——Don't you *know* who he is? Can't you instinctively *divine?* Good Heavens, Staunton, that fellow is De Laurnay, the wretch who—who *would* have stolen your wife!"

For one moment the baronet was horror-stricken, noting the effect of his own words; for it seemed to him that the Herculean frame of the stalwart man beside him literally reeled, staggered, tottered; that John Staunton, livid to the very lips, must have utterly collapsed and fallen, save for his own iron grasp of his friend's nerveless arm.

Then—"Oh! Heaven!" escaped him, in the voice of a man who articulates aloud in the throes of some awful dream; "I see it all now. Fooled! fooled! fooled! Heaven help me! I—I would sooner far have seen her in her grave!"

"Be calm. Listen, John!" Sir Archibald began, in authoritatives tones; "we must follow that scoundrel; run him to earth in his own lair! See! he is moving on! Hist! *v'la!*" he signalled to a passing *cocher*, who drew his *fiacre* up at once alongside the curb.

But to his amaze, John rallied instantaneously, and rousing himself by a vigorous shake, forestalled his friend, by calmly pointing out the Comte to Jehu, and deliberately instructing that sagacious worthy to follow at a snail's pace down the boulevard, keeping the marked man's "white buttonhole" steadfastly in view. Then he tapped the baronet briskly upon the shoulder.

"Come, *mon ami!*" he said, briefly, and both men jumped inside.

But there was silence between them, absolute and unbroken, as the cab slowly wound its way in and out among the crowd of equipages dashing rapidly along the brilliantly lighted boulevard, and down the wide Avenue de l' Opera ablaze with electric lamps. The baronet felt dimly conscious that such words of consolation, suggestion, or advice as he might have volunteered, would appear inopportune—nay, well-nigh impertinent, however well-intentioned—in the face of such hopeless anguish, such crushing woe, as the rigid, ghastly pallor of John's face, his breathless silence, and his motionless attitude, all too forcibly conveyed.

Yet the young baronet realised instinctively that this injured husband was man enough to face the situation. Ay, and *master* it alone, unaided, grappling with circumstances as should appear to him best, without seeking counsel or assistance from any other in so harrowing and unforeseen an emergency; so Sir Archibald held his peace, strangely awed by the silent dignity of John's demeanour, and breathless from excess of respectful sympathy with the man whose cup of bitterness seemed, indeed, full to overflowing.

Before the brilliantly illuminated doors of the great Hôtel Continentale itself the cab came

at length to a full stop. For the "Monsieur" the *cocher* had been bidden to follow, had entered the courtyard and passed within.

For a breathing space both Englishmen stared blankly at one another; then by mute accord they simultaneously alighted, dismissed the cab, and, still in unbroken silence, turned in at the familiar portals.

"Who is that gentleman who has just entered—tall, pale, dark, and thin—with the white flower in his coat?" John questioned, calmly, of the *concierge*, who touched his hat respectfully to "Messieurs the English."

"Monsieur le Comte de Chambri, sar," the man responded in obsequious tones.

"Does he often come here? Is he known to——"

"The Comte is located within, Monsieur—ha! ha! His rooms, now that I remember, adjoin those of Monsieur's party, the family of the English pastor, Numero 93—Gallery 10, on the second *étage* along the grand corridor, and if——"

"Enough—enough!" John motioned him to silence with an authoritative air, and turned towards his friend.

"What—what shall you do?" Sir Archie questioned.

"Dress for the Embassy ball," was the stern response, in a voice of unnatural calm, though every nerve in John's body was quivering then—every vein swelled nigh to bursting; "and see *this* played out to the bitter end. What will you?—*mon ami!* Is not life at best a drama?—sometimes tragedy, sometimes farce—dreary enough, Heaven knows, *any* way! You—you will return in the course of an hour?"

"If I live!" was the fervent, laconic response, uttered in a low, choked voice, which somehow sounded well-nigh solemn as a vow.

Then Sir Archibald Hope wrung his friend's hand, and silently turned on his heel; whilst John Staunton smothered a sigh, which was almost a moan, and passed slowly on towards the familiar staircase conducting to his own rooms.

The electric lamps were blazing in the great courtyard; the fountains sang "drip, drip" as they splashed in a feathery stream of silver over the huge tropical ferns and plants ranged round the porphyry basin; great vases of flowers sent forth their sensuous fragrance upon the balmy evening air; and a thousand lights, flashing from the hotel windows, made the quadrangle brilliant as a mimic fairy land, through which John Staunton made his way like a clock-work figure wound up to a certain pitch—only clock-work figures know nothing of the unutterable woe which sometimes swells a strong man's heart to bursting, and racks a human brain to frenzy, madness, and despair.

CHAPTER XI.

A FEUILLE TRYST.

After half-an-hour's serious and uninterrupted meditation, Sir Archibald Hope duly completed an elaborate toilette, and had himself conveyed, according to arrangement, to the Hôtel Continentale. Mounting to Miss Prior's *salon*, he found Josephine already fully equipped for the coming fray, and John Staunton likewise in evening dress. Vivien, however, was enveloped in a white muslin *peignoir*, or morning wrapper, trimmed with dainty lace and floating knots of pale pink ribbons—a bewitching and becoming costume in its way, yet one which even Sir Archibald's obtuse masculine perceptions perceived at a glance to be designed for conquest in the boudoir rather than for the open warfare of the ball-room battlefield.

Josephine—radiantly beautiful in cream satin and pearls, as it seemed to the enamoured baronet—met him at the door with a crest-fallen air; all her anticipations of enjoyment had been rudely overthrown; for Vivien, pleading indisposition, had suddenly declared her intention of remaining at home alone.

Sir Archie stared blankly at Vivien for one moment, then involuntarily turned eyes of mute interrogation towards John, who stood in his favourite attitude with his back to the stove, diligently caressing his dark moustache.

"And you, John? I suppose, then, Josie and I must go alone?"

"On the contrary," was the imperturbably cool rejoinder, in John Staunton's sternest tones; "although I fear I shall find myself sadly *de trop*, it is my decided intention to inflict my society upon you. An Embassy ball in Paris is a sight one cannot see every day—moreover, as Vivien is not well she will doubtless prefer solitude."

"Yes—I shall go to bed presently! I would not hear of John's remaining at home!" the young wife protested, earnestly, catching her quivering lip between her teeth, and unconsciously clasping those white, nerveless hands, which lay folded on her knee. "My head is bad—that is all. I shall be well enough to-morrow."

And truly she looked white and wan enough to justify the plea she had entered of "incapacity, on the score of indisposition!"

Gazing into the lovely face, upon which anguish had wrought such cruel havoc, Sir Archibald hated himself for his own suspicions, and shot a mutely interceding glance in the direction of Vivien's stern and silent lord. But John Staunton was calmly drawing on his gloves, smoothing every wrinkle out of the fingers with elaborate care. His face just then, though set and white, was absolutely impassive, his equanimity apparently unruffled; yet, calm and imperturbable though he appeared, Sir Archie instinctively divined the hideous thought, the fell suspicion which was meanwhile gnawing at his heart strings, with fangs as sharp as those wherewith the historic foe consumed the vitals of his heroic Spartan victim.

For had the baronet just then been compelled to give his own thoughts voice, he must have confessed, to tell the truth, that he himself feared the worst.

Nothing, however, now remained to be done but to help Josephine on with her cloak and wish Mrs. Staunton good-night. An air of painful constraint hung oppressively over all, and each member of the party, by tacit consent, combined to cut short the inevitable *adieux*.

Josephine, not unnaturally, was full of solicitude on her sister's account, declaring that under the circumstances she herself would have preferred to stay at home; she should insist upon leaving early, she assured the gentlemen, despite Vivien's well-nigh frantic protest that she should be in bed and asleep in a very short time; and finally, snatching up her fan and bouquet with an air of chagrin, suffered Sir Archibald to lead her from the room, a very woe-begone expression clouding her usually placid face.

John, busy buttoning his lavender gloves wished his wife a curt "good-night," without one additional word; only somewhat more stiffly than his wont, he inclined his head (as though he found it difficult to stoop), and lightly brushed her white brow with his moustache, when Vivien raised her face appealingly, in expectation, seemingly, of that cold, conventional ghost of a caress which was all John Staunton now-a-days ever bestowed upon his wife.

"John!" she faltered, in a voice so hoarse and low that it scarcely rose above a whisper, "John!"

Arrested by that word, he turned upon the threshold where he stood, in the act of following the others.

"Well?" he questioned, coldly.

"John!"

The anguish in her voice was so unfeigned, the look in her lovely eyes so piteous, she herself in her white, hopeless, despairing beauty so pathetic and *seductante*, that the man who loved her better far than his own life—the man whose very soul was just then riven by the agony of jealousy and suspicion—was powerless to resist that faint appeal.

John returned to her side, mesmerically impelled, it seemed, and stood mute and breathless gazing down upon her, his very lips just then blanched to the hue of the neckcloth he wore, his heart beating so heavily it seemed to shake his entire frame.

"Well?" he questioned, hoarse and stern.

"John!" she rose up then (her supple limbs quivering beneath her slender weight like reeds in the wintry blast), and wound her cold, trembling hands about his rigid arm. "John! you are not—*angry* with me?" she faltered, choking back a tearless sob.

One moment only he gazed down into her limpid, upturned eyes, then he glanced aside; he dared not trust himself to look upon her, so fair, so winsome, and so false! His heart gave one great lunge. Ah! false and treacherous though she might be, was she not dearer far to him in her sinful loveliness than all the spotless, virtuous women of whom the world might boast? Yet he must have a care lest he should be utterly unmanned.

"No, I am not *angry* with you, Vivien!" he answered, coldly (yet, was there not a suspicion of a tremor in his voice?) "I wish you your headache better; and, good-night—good-night!"

"Ah! John! if—if you did but know," she gasped, or *tried* to gasp, for in truth she never knew whether the words she sought to frame were audible to his ear, for already he was gone, releasing himself, almost roughly it seemed to her, and passing swiftly through the open door without one backward glance.

"Oh! Heaven!" she moaned, "Oh! Heaven!" then she sank down upon her knees from sheer incapacity to stand, perhaps, and buried her snow-white, tear-stained face among the cushions of the couch.

It was insupportable, unendurable, this carking anguish and despair, which were settling down upon her like a cruel frost, chilling her very heart's blood, paralysing thought and action, numbing her energies, and rapidly reducing her to the level of an inanimate machine. For she was becoming stupefied by terror, and a suspense more painful to endure than the worst *actual* evil she could picture—anything, *everything* else would surely be far easier to bear.

For years past but little confidence had existed between herself and Josephine, so Vivien had thus far locked heart to cloud her sister's new-born happiness, by inflicting upon her a confession of Gaston De Launay's visit and intimidation, and the miserable duplicity of which she had subsequently been guilty in presenting him to her husband as the *Comte de Chambri*, "a friend of Sir Archibald Hope's!"

Already Vivien bitterly regretted that she had not nerved herself a few hours earlier to confess all and bear the worst; for in how brief a while now *must* the truth transpire, when she literally dared not attempt to picture the inevitable result!

Josephine, in all probability, would betray Gaston's real identity to John, in the first moment of *rencontre*; then—then what *would* he, *could* he think of the treacherous part his guilty wife had played but a few days earlier? What construction *could* he place upon the duplicity she had been so reluctantly induced to practise?

Ah! but in any case surely he must at once absolve her from having wantonly displeased and disappointed him to-night. He would understand how impossible it would have been for her to go forth with him to the Embassy ball there to encounter the count.

There was consolation in this reflection, albeit meagre—surely some kindly instinct would whisper John, (confronted with the truth) that she had essayed to act for the best—that she had not wilfully deceived and disappointed him!

And after to-night there must and should come an end in any case to this awful and unnaturally strained state of existence; she would confess all—yes, *all* to John, and then he must decide at once and for ever whether he

could extend to her genuine and entire forgiveness of the past, or whether he would prefer to banish her from his presence for ever.

Surely this last fate, however arid, chill, and drear, would constitute bliss, perfect and unalloyed, compared to the bitter, ceaseless anguish of spirit she had for long months past endured!

Ay, an end *must* come to this miserable tragedy, in which she suddenly realised her own utter inability longer to sustain her own ignoble part. John might spurn, revile, repudiate her—as it seemed, indeed, all too likely that he would—she would bear her sentence uncomplainingly, and submit without a murmur to ignominious expulsion from his home, seeking to expiate in solitude the crime which had wrecked her life; but to continue to support existence under its present auspices was a task altogether beyond her strength, one under whose hopeless burden her heart had suddenly turned sick and cold and faint.

Within a few brief hours now at farthest the drop-scene of her old past miserable life must fall; to-morrow she must rise up to fight a short, fierce battle, and then to begin the world anew!

To-morrow! but meanwhile, what of *to-night?*

Vivien shuddered; she dared not give rein to her imagination, nor permit herself to follow in fancy events which must perforce transpire within the course of the next few hours but a few hundred yards from the door of her own hotel.

Oh! Heaven! would this night *never* wear away? Would to-morrow—a gladder, brighter day, perchance—*ever* dawn for her?

Meanwhile, Sir Archibald's brougham and pair was dashing along the crowded thoroughfares at a pace which foreign Johns significantly stigmatise as "marvellous!" and "English quite!"

The trio within were strangely silent, considering the occasion and the gay scene for which they were bound. The lovers exchanged a brief remark from time to time; but John Staunton never spoke—and the baronet's heart, to confess the truth, was scarcely less heavy than his friend's.

"We might be funeral guests!" Josephine cried, impatiently, as the carriage came to a full stop, and Sir Archibald jumped out, and assisted her to alight. "I can't think what ails us all to-night. Poor Vivien's headache has proved infectious. I myself *feel* more inclined for bed than ball! John, what are *you* so grave about? Remember you're here to make one of the festive throng—not to play the part of a mute at a funeral feast."

"Yet, as my last lingering hope died but an hour ago," John muttered, in so low a tone that it escaped Josie's ear, as upon Sir Archibald's arm she preceded her brother-in-law up the wide staircase, "why should I disdain to appear as chief mourner? The whole wide world henceforth for me is but the grave of my lost happiness!"

"De Laurnay is not here yet, I fancy," the baronet whispered, significantly, some quarter of an hour later, when our trio had made the tour of the magnificent suite of rooms. "What do you intend to do, John?"

"Await his arrival," was the laconic response, in a voice which made even Sir Archie's bold heart momentarily quake, as he thought with a pang of compassion of the absent and unconscious Comte. "He must needs put in an appearance—however brief—if only for decency's sake."

The baronet argued differently. From his knowledge of De Laurnay he deemed it highly probable he would not waste one of the precious seconds of his appointed *rendezvous* with Vivien, out of mere regard for appearances. It was even possible that his application for a ticket had only been part of a fatally well-contrived ruse calculated to lull suspicion, if any such should be aroused by Vivian's premeditated feint of indisposition.

Yet Sir Archibald held his peace. For there was that in the expression of John's eyes to-night which made his friend reflect that no matter at what cost to the young wife's reputation it were a thousandfold better she should clandestinely entertain Gaston De Laurnay in the salon of the Hôtel Continentale, in the absence of her lord, than that the injured husband and guilty lover should suddenly find themselves face to face, here and thus, with that terrible vital secret rankling at each heart.

For that there would be blood *shed*, if not life *spilt*, the baronet did not doubt; so he held his peace, and let John "wait!" Waiting, he might grow calm.

But the Comte de Chambri had failed to appear, even when the great gilded clock over the grand staircase had proclaimed, in solemn, sepulchral tones, that the hour was twelve.

Meanwhile, John Staunton was wandering restlessly round about the rooms with an expression in his dark eyes akin to that which gleams from the lurid pupils of a famished wolf, seeking whom he may devour.

But John Staunton's quest was vain. Gaston De Laurnay did not come.

CHAPTER XII.

SUDDENLY Vivien rose up shivering—how still it was, how lonesome! A nameless horror seemed creeping stealthily through her every vein.

It was but ten o'clock. The rector slept, and she was bound to remain here at her post until his valet should awaken him and summon her to administer the medicinal draught which he took each night about eleven from his younger daughter's hand. Then she would go at once to her own room—she would feel less nervous there.

The low windows opening out upon the balcony stood ajar, for the night was balmy as a midsummer eve. Vivien crossed the room and for a moment stood gazing out, up at the star-spangled vault of heaven, then down into the brilliantly lighted court below.

Presently she shuddered; a horrible notion had flashed across her mind. She glided swiftly towards the door; opening it she snatched the key from without, and quick as thought turned it in the lock *inside*, then drew a deep breath of relief, standing motionless one moment with both hands crossed upon her heaving breast.

She was safe for the time being now, at any rate; no one could seek to enter without striking a preliminary warning note; thus she would gain time for parley, time to summons self-control and self-possession—time (if the worst should come to the worst) to take refuge even in flight.

For that Gaston himself might seek to force an entrance was the horrible notion which had just presented itself to her mind. Finding her husband, Sir Archie and Josephine at the ball *without* her, was it not possible that he would withdraw after an hour or so, and—— Ah, Heavens! what was that? A startled, smothered cry escaped her; she turned her head, her eyes grew wild, for the subject of her thoughts, *in propria persona* and full evening dress, with the Legion of Honour at his buttonhole, sprang in from the balcony lightly as a bird, drawing the window to behind him with a sharp, decided "click-clack."

With three strides he gained the door, snatched the key from the lock, transferred it to his waistcoat pocket, then crossed the room, and bowing low stood by Vivien's side.

"Coward!" she hissed, in a voice which terror rendered almost inaudible, "you saw my husband at the ball, so——"

"*Pardon*, madame. I *watched* Monsieur Staunton, your sister and Sir Archibald leave the hotel together *without you*, so I spared myself the unnecessary exertion of attending at the Embassy to-night! All I seek is here! What I desire I have already found. Oh, Vivien! do not turn away from me! Have pity! See—see me brought thus low, kneeling in the dust at your very feet, here upon the ground! Vivien, surely you will give me *one* 'kind' word, a glance, a sign—some token that you are not——"

"The despicable thing you *dare* to think me?" she retorted, passionately, turning swiftly upon him then, her eyes ablaze, albeit her face was white as death. "Oh, Gaston! you surely do not need me to tell you that if a suspicion of this should reach my husband's ears, we are—assuredly we *both* are lost! Why—why then——"

"It *shall* not reach him until we are safe beyond all danger of vengeance or pursuit!" he answered, tenderly, springing to his feet, and seeking to wind his arm about her where she stood. "I am here to rescue you, my darling—here to bear you away a second time from a life you loathe—to carry you off from the man you hate, in the strong arms of him whom you love! Fly with me—now, to-night, and I swear to you, Vivien——"

"How *dare* you, coward?" she hissed, in a voice which passion rendered so low and indistinct that Gaston for a moment was doubtful as to her meaning. "I am alone, unprotected, and so you—you come to terrify and——"

"I terrify you, Vivien?" he echoed, blankly. "Since when have I inspired 'terror?' Terror and love walk not hand in hand! You were not wont to be alarmed when we sat side by side beneath the elms at Westlands during the long summer afternoons; you——"

"Spare me all such allusions!" she fairly moaned, covering her face with both her hands, as though to shut out the picture his words had all too vividly conjured up. "I am a broken-hearted woman; crushed, humiliated, degraded in my own sight, not less than in the eyes of others by the mere recollection (which nothing—nothing in the whole wide world has power to wipe out) of—of a base premeditated crime! Then——"

"Crime! You will not expect *me* to echo that word, Vivien? Crime is——"

"Loathsome—despicable—fatal! Fatal to happiness on earth—fatal to tranquillity or peace hereafter. Sin is its own avenger, for the heart is doomed to expiate——"

"Since when have you turned preacher?" he interrupted, with a sneer. "You make a pretty saint, *ma belle*; but, to my mind, you played far better the rôle of fascinating sinner. I——"

"Neither saint nor sinner," she interrupted, bowing her head on her hands. "A penitent, contrite woman you see before you now, monsieur. I am that, neither more nor less—a woman seeking to expiate! A woman striving, struggling—ah, so desperately! Respect my efforts, Gaston; and do me the only favour within your power now! Go—I beseech you go!"

"Go!" he echoed, fiercely, wildly. "Are you dreaming, Vivien? Go I *will*, but not alone! It is to claim the fulfilment of your promise—the reward of my fidelity, that I am here—at risk, at peril of my life. It is to rescue the prize snatched from my grasp——"

"Gaston, you are mad!" she cried, incautiously, casting prudence to the winds in the excess of impotent despair. "Unless you go at once, and promise—*swear* that you will never more return—I—I warn you that I—I shall have no resource but to tell my husband *all* before I sleep to-night, and to beg him to carry me far away. I care not whither, so only that—that I am secure from the danger of—of your ever more crossing my path! It is killing me, this—this shameless secret, this terrible suspense, this dread that, directly John is absent, you—you——"

"*Et moi donc?*" he interrupted, fiercely, seizing her roughly by the arm. "What sort of life do you think is *mine?*—the life you have condemned me to? You have marred my peace, you have wrecked my hopes, you have made me willing to sacrifice *all*, for the mere sound of your voice, the sight of your face, one touch of your little hand, one glance of your cold, cruel eyes; and yet you calmly bid me 'go!' Madame, you have still apparently to learn that a man's heart is not a ball,

designed merely as a plaything for a woman's foot! You promised to renounce *all* in order to share my life! I hold you to your word; I——"

Both started, turned, and stood one moment mute, for to the ears of both it seemed a hand *without* was laid just then upon the handle of the door.

"I—I will cry for help!" Vivien murmured, faintly, clasping appealing hands. "It is Armand, or my father's servant come to summon me! Oh, Gaston!"

"The intruder has gone his way and left you to your fate!" the Comte returned, with a shrug of his shoulders, and an implacable air. "Some passing *garçon*, probably, who has shown discretion by withdrawing quietly. Hark! do you not hear the sound of retreating footsteps?—for no matter what his errand, madame, I should have had no choice but to deny him admission here. You are at my mercy, Vivien—you shiver! Since when have you learnt to recoil from my touch—to shun my gaze—to cower and shudder at sound of the voice of the man you love—to——"

"Hold!" she interrupted, wildly; "I do *not* love you, Gaston De Laurnay! Surely you do not need me to tell you twice that——"

"You do *not* love me, Vivien? Did you then swear falsely in those summer days just dead, when——"

"Ah! I never loved you, Gaston, though, indeed—indeed I did not wantonly deceive you! In those days—as I have since discovered to my cost—I was ignorant as a child, and all unversed in the secrets of my own unawakened heart!"

"Yet, even then, you remember, Vivien, you had been for two long years a *wife!* You knew enough to tremble, shudder, and recoil at the mere notion of setting forth to rejoin your husband—enough to implore *me* to save and shield you from him when the news arrived of his return, and you dreaded to meet him face to face!"

"True—true!" she moaned, abjectly, covering her face with both her hands, and cowering like a guilty, broken-hearted creature; "I feared to encounter John, yet that does not prove that I loved *you!*"

"Does it not? You would have me, then, conclude that you were only coquetting with me? and, having beguiled the tedium of existence during your husband's absence at my expense, you naturally turned to me in the hour of——"

"No, no—ten thousand times! I was not so base, so utterly culpable as you think. You have been wronged, deceived, and cruelly ill-used by me, but *not*—I swear it solemnly, here upon my knees at your very feet" (and, indeed, she dropped to earth, clasping her hands despairingly even as she spoke)—"not from motives so base and despicable as those you ascribe to the guilty woman, the treacherous wife, who is in truth deserving of the righteous scorn of all humanity!"

"Spare me melodrama, madame!" he retorted, bitterly, seizing her by the arm and forcing her to her feet; "what was the sentiment—if I may make bold to ask—you entertained towards me then, when you permitted *me*, at any rate, to talk to you of love?"

"I know not! Ah! in truth I know not! I, myself, *mistook* perhaps. I—I was all unversed then in——"

"Then, then!" he echoed, fiercely, "you would have me understand then, that since we parted six months ago, that slumbering heart of yours has awakened, the latent spark has ignited at last; *someone* has finally succeeded in putting a match to the tow? Would it be presumptuous of me to inquire the name of my happier rival, madame!—the hero whose efforts have been crowned with success where I ignominiously *failed!*"

"Yes, yes! you have indeed the right to ask, and to know the truth; and if, indeed, there is aught of satisfaction to be gleaned from the pitiful facts, these I will lay before you, monsieur, only praying you will show me all the leniency in your power, and then leave me at once and for ever!"

She sank upon a low seat as she spoke, pressing her handkerchief one moment to her lips and eyes. De Laurnay, meanwhile, leaning against a table opposite, regarded her fixedly, with a terrible expression upon his face, baffled passion and rage suppressed contorting his livid features, and making him look haggard, aged and worn, as a man of twice his years.

"When I married John, I—I did *not* love him! Afterwards, I—I grew jealous of his regard for Josephine—Josephine whom I have since learnt to venerate almost as a saint! Then, when John left me, I—I wearied of life itself and felt myself ill-used! I welcomed you as a distraction, monsieur, and grew to regard your visits as bright spots in the dreary desert of existence. When John ultimately wrote to me to join him, it was—it was, perhaps, because I dreaded to say good-bye to *you*, that I—I decided to remain!"

Her voice here sank to a mere whisper, and then a pause ensued, the while she rocked herself slowly backwards and forwards in a paroxysm of shame and despair.

"Proceed, madame!" issued sternly from De Laurnay's bloodless lips, and the words were well-nigh imperious as a command.

"Well, you know as well as I what culpable folly ensued! Then, when news of John's return reached me unexpectedly—guilty, degraded woman as I was—I naturally shrank from meeting one so honest, so trustful, yet, alas! so *relentless*, as the husband I had wronged. So I turned to you in my miserable anguish and despair! I—I *believed* I loved you then, Gaston. I solemnly protest, I did not *wilfully* deceive either you or myself. It was not until—until long after that I—I learned to understand the truth!"

"You *did* love me, Vivien, you did—you *do!* By Heaven! I swear you do! and now——"

"Listen!" It was now *her* turn to wax imperious, and with an almost regal air of calm authority she raised one snow-white, unfaltering hand. "You know the ruse by which Sir Archibald rescued me from lifelong shame; but you do *not* know how—how the husband I had outraged acted towards me from the very moment that he bore me almost lifeless back to the home I had forfeited all right to enter, much less to share. And I"—she broke off suddenly, starting once more to her feet—"I lack strength or courage to dwell on details. I care only to be brief! I had saved my honour, but lost—his love. Since that hour down to the present moment he has been husband of mine only in name; he has considerately 'spared' me the 'infliction of his society,' he has 'generously foreborne' to harrass me with attentions or—or caresses which he felt would be unwelcome; whilst I—I have learnt daily, hourly to—to *love* him—my lord and master—as—as surely mortal man was never loved before! So must I love him to the end, Gaston; and he—he has nothing but proud indifference, cold, stern contempt to mete out in return to one so utterly unworthy as the wretched woman who bears his name. Thus my sin has proved my punishment; and, sometimes, it seems to me, I shall go mad when I reflect that I am henceforth doomed to hopeless, life-long expiation and——"

"Nay—say rather, that *having* already expiated—through sorrow and suffering—sweet wife, you are thrice purified and holier far than those who have never sinned; precious—inestimably precious—moreover, in the sight of him who has vainly striven thoughout long months past to oust you from his heart! Come back, my love—come back to the safe haven of my arms! Death alone shall part us twain, whom Heaven has reunited; and, henceforth, welcome even sorrow, for shall we not meet it, bear it—ay, and *defeat* it, with Heaven's help, together?"

Both De Laurnay and Vivien had simultaneously started, and stared aghast when the opening words of this sentence had fallen in a low voice, passion shaken, upon their astonished ears. To them it seemed that each was the victim of some incomprehensible hallucination, for those low, unexpected tones had all the awe-inspiring solemnity of a voice from beyond the tomb; but, as by mute accord they turned, it was to behold John Staunton himself in the flesh, framed like some gaunt spectre—so still and motionless—between the fluttering lace curtains which draped the farther window opening upon the balcony—a window which, unperceived by either, had been left ajar, John, quivering from head to foot—strong man though he was—like an aspen leaf in the summer gale. John, with humid eyes rivetted upon his wife—eyes filled to overflowing—with reverential love and longing, wistful tenderness and yearning—an indefinable expression, which Gaston De Laurnay to his dying day never might forget.

"John!" escaped Vivien's dry, trembling lips. That was all; then she stood still (with parted lips and wide, distended eyes, both hands clasped above that poor, wildly-beating heart of hers, which swelled just then nigh to bursting) rooted, seemingly, by an amaze too deep for the relief of words to the spot whereon she stood.

"Listen, wife!" he continued, in the same strange far-off voice—a voice such as might emanate from a phantom figure, or a man speaking in a dream—"before you come back to my arms for ever listen to *my* confession, even as I, unjustifiably perhaps, have overheard your own. For I, too, am guilty; I too have sinned. It may even be that your sweet lips shall decree I too must expiate! Before I left you here to-night I had learned your secret, knew that this gentleman here, the Comte de Chambri and Gaston De Laurnay were one, identical, and the same. When you feigned indisposition—to escape the *rencontre*, as I *now* believe—I suspected, nay, would have *sworn*, you had skilfully manœuvred to be left alone in order to grant Monsieur le Comte a rendezvous. Finding him absent from the ball, I returned to confront you both together, found the door locked, and heard the very voices I had anticipated in earnest conclave within this room, forced open monsieur's door (adjoining) to find his apartment deserted, slipped round by the balcony, and, unsuspected, at the open window heard sufficient of your dialogue to—to prove to me that I—I had basely and *unjustly* suspected the woman I so passionately loved, and that I—I am in truth at this very moment the happiest man upon earth! Vivien, I need not add that I have loved you unvaringly and ever, even as I love you now, as I must love you to the end! Vivien, will you come?"

As his voice died away in a tremulous whisper John extended wide his arms, still he did not advance a single step; then with a wild, frenzied cry she sprang towards him, and as an inarticulate rapturous murmur escaped his lips, John Staunton folded his wife to his heart, and bowed his head upon her own.

De Laurnay stood one breathless, agonised moment, like a man physically paralysed.

"Sir!" he began, hoarsely, fiercely; then he paused, for John, winding one arm about his wife, advanced towards his rival, holding out his strong right hand.

"Monsieur, this moment is too full for me of perfect joy to permit of earthly alloy. There is my hand; good-night, good-bye! I would fain be left alone for awhile with—with my little wife; but first from the bottom of my heart I—I venture to wish you God-speed! You have been wronged; you have suffered grievously, and I—I cannot wonder that—that you loved her as you did! I think it would have been easier to hate you if—if you had loved her less! Fair and resistless as she is, I understand too well at once your temptation and your excuse. Forgive her and forgive me—in that I am happier than yourself! To have loved Vivien, and to have *lost* her, is a sufficient punishment, it seems to

me, for any earthly crime. I have endured its throes myself, and—poltroon though you may deem me—by Heaven, sir, I can think no more of vengeance at a moment so full for me of bliss! For you, moreover, I feel nought save deep commiseration! You won't refuse my hand, monsieur? Say good-bye and let us part!"

One moment only De Laurnay hesitated, gazing strangely, fixedly at Staunton; then his glance wandered towards Vivien's face and rested there, undergoing the while a singular metamorphis.

"I—I could not take your life," he muttered, hoarsely, "without destroying all chance of happiness for *her!* Make her happy, 'tis all I ask of you! I loved her well, believe me—as well, perhaps (though assuredly less nobly) as yourself; but the odds were terribly against me! Fate, from the first, was on *your* side!"

"And right and honour!" John supplemented, softly. "Yes, you were heavily handicapped, monsieur. Let us forget the past!"

"Forget—*never!* Forgive—yes! She loves you, moreover; and so for me there remains nothing but to withdraw! May you be happy—both! What matter that for me the sun of life has set?"

Then he wrung John's hand, though with obvious effort; and with one wistful, farewell glance at Vivien passed through the open window out into the silent, starlit night.

* * * * *

Making their way, arm-in-arm, up the broad staircase a full hour later, Josephine and Sir Archibald almost stumbled up against the Comte de Chambri, who was descending hastily, wrapped in his travelling cloak.

"Monsieur De Laurnay!" cried Josephine, aghast. "Where—where have you come from? Where are you going to?" she questioned, incoherently.

One moment, then he paused, and both noticed how ghastly were his features, how agonised the expression of his face.

"Mademoiselle," he answered, strangely, "I came from the gates of Paradise! Standing, shivering without, I was privileged to gaze within—at those happier, surely, than the angels, steeped to the lips in mortal bliss! I go whither those go upon whom the porphyry gates are closed for ever. Farewell—farewell!"

Entering the great *salon* a few moments later, the lovers found a pair of rivals already in the field—Vivien seated upon John's knee, with her white arms locked about his neck—her fair, flushed, tear-stained face buried upon her husband's breast.

The frail barque which had so nearly foundered had reached its true haven at last. Safely anchored in John's strong arms, Vivien already feels that for her life's storms and perils are well-nigh past. She can, at any rate, defy the breakers, and regard such clouds (as must perforce scud from time to time across the heaven of all human happiness) with the unshrinking, fearless gaze of one at rest—in port!

What need to add that when Josephine an Sir Archibald learned the whole truth before the happy party separated for the night, their unselfish joy was scarcely less than that of the reunited couple, for whose sakes both the baronet and Miss Prior had endured so much.

[THE END.]

THE march of progress in railway travelling can be seen by the arrangements that the London and North-Western make for the convenience of travellers going long distances. Their first-class carriages are furnished with sleeping berths and lavatories fitted up with every convenience, to which access is obtained by a door opening into the compartment. This arrangement, securing greater privacy to a family or party, is no doubt preferable from an English point of view to the Pullman car arrangement. The journey from London to Edinburgh is now done in nine hours.

HANDS AND FEATURES—SIGNS OF CHARACTER.

IT has been well remarked the principal lines of the hand may easily be traced: The life-line, which runs round the base of the thumb; the line of the head, which begins alongside of the line of life (sometimes joining it), and crossing the middle of the palm; and the line of the heart, which goes from one side of the hand to the other at the base of the fingers. If the line of life is of a ruddy colour, long and unbroken, extending nearly or quite down to the wrist line, it foretells good health and long life; if it be broken in any point it denotes severe sickness; if short, early death; if double, it shows remarkable strength and vitality. The lines encircling the wrist number the years of life, one line marking thirty years.

If a character like the sun occurs on the life-line, it denotes loss of an eye or blindness; and each cross or knot means some misfortune or difficulty, great or small, according to the size of the mark. The little lines are the lesser cares and troubles. Wavy lines, in the ends of the fingers or elsewhere, foretell death by drowning. A crescent-shaped mark below the little finger and below the line of the heart denotes insanity. A well-defined short line joining the life-line indicates marriage. If no such line appears, the person will remain single, unless there be a short line or lines on the side of the hand below the little finger, as these also denote the number of times married. The lines extending down between the third or ring finger and the little finger to the line of the heart, number the loves of a lifetime. If but a single line is visible, and that is deep and clear, the person will love faithfully and warmly. A long and well-defined line of the head promises intellectual power, but it may be too long; as, if it extends quite to the edge of the hand it indicates too much calculation, craft, meanness. It should end under the third finger or thereabouts. If it is forked or double towards the end it denotes deception and double-dealing, though, in a hand otherwise good, it may mean only extreme reticence or shyness. When this line is very short and faint it shows stupidity, foolishness.

If the line of the heart is long, extending from the edge of the hand below the little finger, up between the first and second fingers, it indicates an affectionate disposition and also promises well for the happiness of the possessor. If it sends down short lines toward the head line, it shows that affection must be founded upon respect; but if these small lines go upward, love is more a passion and impulse. When the line of the heart is broken, it denotes inconsistency. But judgment must not be formed from any one appearance or line of the hand, as there are many things to be considered.

We should look in the left hand chiefly for honours, riches, loves, and misfortunes, and in the right for whatever pertains to health and length of days. All lines, if pale and wide, tell the absence of the quality attributed to that line, or the existence of the opposite quality. For instance, a pale, wide line of the heart indicates coldness or even cruelty. When the lines of the left hand are clearest and ruddiest its possessor resembles his mother, both mentally and physically.

In the practice of the art of palmistry some knowledge of physiognomy is of great advantage; indeed, the two sciences go hand in hand, one supplementing the other. This is why the shrewd gipsy fortune-teller scans the face almost more closely than the hand of her patron. A few set rules in regard to the features and characteristics of the human face may well be added in this connection.

And first of all, the soul dwells in the eye; and the ability to understand its language is inborn with most people without having to study it; but a few words in regard to it may not be amiss. Very quiet eyes that impress and embarrass one with their great repose signify self-command, but also great complacency and conceit. Eyes that rove hither and thither while their possessor speaks denotes a deceitful, designing mind. Eyes in which the white has a yellowish tinge, and is streaked with reddish veins, denote strong passions. Very blue eyes bespeak a mind inclined to coquetry. Grey eyes signify intelligence; greenish, falsehood and a liking for scandal; black eyes, a passionate, lively temperament; and brown, a kind, happy disposition.

Of the nose—a Roman nose denotes an enterprising, business-like character; a long nose is a sign of good sense; a perfectly straight nose indicates a pure and noble soul, unless the eyes contradict it; a *nez retroussé* signifies a spirit of mischief, wit, and dash; a large nose generally indicates a good mind and heart; a very small nose, good nature, but lack of energy.

Thick lips indicate either great genius or great stupidity; very thin lips, cruelty and falsehood, particularly if they are habitually compressed. Dimples in the cheek signify roguery; in the chin, love and coquetry. A lean face is an indication of intelligence; a fat face shows a person inclined to falsehood.

Irascibility is accompanied by an erect posture, open nostrils, moist temples, displaying superficial veins, which stand out and throb under the least excitement; large, unequal, ill-ranged eyes, and equal use of both hands.

A good genius may be expected from middle stature, blue or grey eyes, large prominent forehead, with temples a little hollow, a fixed, attentive look and habitual inclination of the head.

WHATSOEVER that be within us that feels, thinks, desires and animates, is something celestial, divine, and consequently imperishable.

EVERY man ought to aim at eminence, no, by pulling others down, but by raising himself, and enjoy the pleasure of his superiority whether imaginary or real, without interrupting others in the same felicity.

HOUSES OF CALL.

Who has not read with delight descriptions of the old London taverns, where authors, orators and actors of bygone days gained fresh inspiration nightly?

So closely, indeed, have the old coffee-houses, inns and taverns in London become associated with the names of men of letters, so endless are the anecdotes told of these eccentric people, of their saying and doings, their witticisms and their epigrams, which have reached us from these snug retreats, that no biographer or a literary man of any note who has lived any time during the last three hundred years could be complete without some reference to more than one tavern. They were the haunts of those who had a fund of learning, and were eager to exchange ideas.

The surroundings were eminently characteristic of men who placed erudition before every other "circumstance" by which our lives are governed. Here they could feast over each other's words, and serve them up *réchauffé* with a bowl of punch.

The floors were sanded, the pipes were of clay, and the seats were wooden, high-backed benches. This may not be the modern notion of comfort; but to men so conservative by nature, a warm room and a curtained compartment, where Shakspeare and Ben Jonson had sat in seats of honour, was an ample compensation for the absence of all showiness and ease; and the gloom and mystery of the courts and alleys in which these old taverns were invariably found, was perhaps the secret of their attraction to men of a retiring and thoughtful disposition.

New faces were seldom seen; it was a sort of club-life, in which the choice of companionship was made in the manner naturally adopted by "birds of a feather" flocking in taverns as in trees.

FACETIÆ.

"Where is the girl of long ago?" sings Joaquin Miller. We saw her the other day, Joe. But she isn't a girl any more. She had grey hair and a wart on her nose, had no teeth, and wore specs.

A wary boy was one day catechised by his teacher in arithmetic. He was asked, "Suppose you had one hundred pounds, and gave away eighty pounds, how would you ascertain how much you had remaining?" He replied, drawlingly, "Well, sir, I—I'd just count it."

Like to Shorten.—"If you will cut me a small sample of this I will find out from my dressmaker how many yards I need, and can send for the goods by the mail." Enfant Terrible:—"Why, mamma, that's just what you said in all the other stores!"

The Reason.—A boy, reading his lesson in school, came to this passage: "And as she sailed down the river——" "Why are the ships called 'she?'" interrupted the teacher. "Because they need men to manage them," was the reply.

A Fastidious.—"Is it a sin?" asks a fashionable lady of her spiritual director, "for me to feel pleasure when a gentleman says I am handsome?" "It is, my daughter," he replies, gravely; "we should never delight in falsehood!"

And Did She Tremble.—"Ma," said a boy, "did you fall this afternoon?" "No. Why do you ask such an absurd question?" "Why, I saw pa squeezin' our servant girl's hand while you was gone, and heard him say he was a'raid you'd stumble to it."

How father stood at the gate talking with a gentleman, and the seven-year-old miss threw out several hints about supper being ready without success. At length, anxious and impatient, she called out, "Papa, if you don't come in to supper at once the ice cream will all get cold."

Last winter a boarding-house keeper rejected a steak which seemed too old for even a boarding-house. It was then used for a doormat for awhile, and was finally buried in the back yard. Two months later a beautiful rubber tree sprang from the ground, and is now in full blossom.—*Puck.*

He'd been waltzing with his host's elderly ugly daughter, and was in a corner repairing damages. Here he was espied by his would-be papa-in-law. "She is the flower of my family, sir," said the latter. "So it seems," answered the young man. "Pity she comes off so, ain't it?" he continued, as he essayed another vigorous rub at the white spots on his coat-sleeve.

It Would Suit.—A pretentious person said to the leading man of a country village: "How would a lecture by me on Mount Vesuvius suit the inhabitants of your village?" "Very well, sir; very well, indeed," he answered. "A lecture by you on Mount Vesuvius would suit them a great deal better than a lecture by you in this village."

A furious enemy of the magistrates was looking for some one at the Palace of Justice. He lost his way in the labyrinth of staircases and corridors, and finding himself before a door he tried to open it. "You cannot go that way," said a guard; "that door is condemned." "The scoundrels!" cried the nervous man, "they have even condemned the doors!"

One Sunday at church the churchwarden was absent, and a well-known financier took one of the contribution plates and passed it around. When the services were over a friend said: "Well, I envy you the confidence these people repose in you. Now, long as I have owned a paw here, I don't believe they would trust *me* to take up a collection." "Oh, yes, they would, Mark; I am sure they would—*if* you had a bell-punch."

There!" said Miss Dashie, as she sealed a letter addressed to her lover; "that isn't very bright, but it will do for him. Lovers are alike. If you only write to them, they don't care what you say."

Sword and Gun.—A clever witticism is attributed to the late Prince Imperial. When asked why people always said "brave as a sword," and never "brave as a cannon," he replied: "Because a cannon always recoils when it is fired."

Four sisters are described as sleeping in one small room at a fashionable resort, and without complaint of overcrowding; but they have to go outside to simultaneously put on their hats, as the area of wide-brimmed millinery exceeds that of the apartment.

"No," said the sad-eyed man, "I never press a young woman to play upon the piano. I tried it once to my sorrow." "Why, what followed?" asked a half-dozen eager voices. "She played," replied the sad-eyed man. "I shall never forget the lesson I learned that day."

It was his first dinner at which he found a programme printed in French, and after examining the bill-of-fare intently from top to bottom, he called to the waiter, and pointing to the word "Menu" at the top, said, "Fetch me a dish of that for a starter."

A Great Rogue.—A judge, pointing his cane to a man who was about to be tried, said: There is a great rogue at the end of my cane!" "At which end?" coolly asked the man to whom he was pointing. The judge reserved his decision.

Cushan was once asked how a member of Parliament had spoken. The answer was, "His speech was a long parenthesis." He was asked to explain. "Why," said he, "don't you know that a parenthesis is a paragraph which may be omitted from beginning to end without any loss of meaning?"

One pleasant day last summer a clergyman repaired to a sequestered nook to enjoy a quiet smoke by himself. A member of his congregation, discovering him in the act, sarcastically asked if he was offering up incense to Satan, to which the D.D. made answer, "Yes, but I didn't know he was so near."

"Do you fear lightning, Miss Fitzjoy?" inquired De Maurice, tenderly, as he saw the gathering storm in the west. "Y-e-e-s, I am somewhat frightened. But the lightning never seems to strike me, although most of the girls of my very set are engaged." With a hint like that, what could De Maurice do but turn on the electric current of a proposal? The wedding thunder is being rehearsed by the Bavarian band.

She Lived Slow.—A bachelor and spinster who had been schoolmates in youth, and were about the same age, met in after years, and the lady chancing to remark that "men live a great deal faster than women," the bachelor replied, "Yes, Maria, the last time we met we were each twenty-four years old; now I am over forty, and I hear you haven't reached thirty yet." They never met again.

SHE SHOOK.

Lady Bloomfield tells an incident of English Court life which shows that royalty can enjoy a joke, as well as its subjects. She says: "My sister, Lady Normanby, was then one of the ladies-in-waiting, which no doubt was the reason of my being admitted so young to Court. One day the Queen expressed a desire to hear me sing, so in fear and trembling I sang one of Grisi's famous airs, but omitted a shake at the end. The Queen's quick ear immediately detected the omission, and smiling, Her Majesty said,—

"'Does not your sister shake, Lady Normanby?'

"My sister immediately answered, 'Oh, yes, ma'am, she is shaking all over.'

"The Queen was much amused, and laughed heartily."

A man wanted a horse to ride at the annual parade. "Do you want a spirited animal?" asked the lively man. "No, not very." "Do you want a quiet one?" "No, not very." "What do you want, then?" "I want a horse that looks a great deal more spirited than he really is."

Their Caution.—"Ma," said Jennie Parvenu, at Scarborough, "they say those Smiths who have got the Jones' cottage are awful stylish, and have got a pedigree." "Got the pedigree, have they?" said Mrs. Parvenu, excitedly; "well, you keep away from them, for I don't want you to catch it."

A business man's son had been at college with the heir of the title a baron and a fine fortune. As soon as the young baron came into possession of his property he ceased all relation with comrades. Several years passed by. One day some said to the business man, "How's your friend the baron? Is he ruined?" "I think so, for yesterday we passed each other on the boulevard, and he saluted me."

Not his Line.—During a conversation upon politics one of the company remarked, philosophically, "It is a pity everybody cannot view these matters as impartially as I do. No matter what the Government is, so long as it is good I accept it; but you don't hear me bellowing everywhere 'Live so-and-so!' That isn't my line!" "I know it isn't," responds another guest; "you're a doctor?"

Students, after a sumptuous repast, to host: "Our compliments to your kitchen and cellar. We have agreed to have a running match, and the one that comes out last will pay the bill. Will you kindly give us the signal to start?" The beaming host slowly counts one, two, three, the students disappear round the corner, and are seen no more. They all won.

"Look here Georgie," said an irritable old man to his son, "I'm told that your teacher says you're the worst boy in the school. What have you to say to that, sir?" "I've only to say, sir, that she has often told me the same thing, and always winds up by saying that I'm exactly like my father." "Ah! humph! This must be looked into," grumbled the old man, as he strode away.

The First Quarrel.—Philip Fogy, Jr., (who has refused, after prolonged discussion, to get gaudy raiment and take his wife to the Desbruno's fancy ball), morosely,—"I wish I had married a sensible woman." His recently-acquired spouse (to whom the said ball is for the moment much more attractive than heaven), vindictively—"She wouldn't have you!"

About Irritable Better Halves.—A critic declares that there is one thing to be said in favour of a hot-tempered woman. She always makes the spiciest dishes. You never knew a mild-tempered woman to make a rich and spicy pie. Her tea is always mild; her chicken is as tame on the table as it was in the coop. But a sharp-witted woman, with a tongue like a saw, will devil a crab, prepare a curry, or serve a rum omelette to a turn.

The Clean Thing.—A little boy visited his uncle on his birthday, and congratulated him. He then asked his uncle if he had washed himself. "Why so?" asked the uncle, patting the innocent prattler on the head. "Because papa said if you did the clean thing you would give me at least a shilling."

Dangerously Well.—A gentleman has the misfortune of being married to a lady who is credited with physically chastising her liege lord upon certain occasions. He was met in the street by an acquaintance. "How is your wife?" inquired the friend. "She is now dangerously ill," was the mournful reply. A month later the friends met again. "How is your wife?" was asked once more. She is now dangerously well," significantly replied the mournful husband, and as he walked off it was noticed that he appeared to be suffering from an injured spine or a bruised limb.

SOCIETY.

Sir Thomas Agnew, the well-known picture dealer, who died last April, has left personal estate in the United Kingdom amounting to upwards of £530,000.

The Hereditary Grand Duke and Duchess of Mecklenburg-Strelitz, with their family, have left St. James's Palace, on their return to Germany.

At the Louvre will be opened shortly two new halls. One of these rooms will contain the collection bequeathed by M. Thiers; the other will be devoted to the aggrandisement of the picture gallery.

A marriage is in contemplation between the Duke of Oporto, youngest son of the King and Queen of Portugal, with the Princess Laetitia, daughter of Prince Napoleon and Princess Clotilde.

The Queen sent a magnificent wreath of white roses and lilies to Frohsdorf, which was placed, with hundreds of others, on the coffin of the Comte de Chambord.

The Princess Mary, who has gained for herself the *sobriquet* of "amiable," has been busy superintending the packing up of her household goods, preparatory to her Continental flight. Her stay, and that of the Duke, is likely to be a lengthy one.

A tablet in honour of Nell Gwynne is, by permission of the Bishop of Hereford, about to be erected on the outer face of his garden wall, which will mark what is alleged to have been the site of the house in which the Royal favourite was born.

The three days' old Archduchess of Austria was conveyed to the chapel on the occasion of her christening in a sedan chair by the mistress of the wardrobe, and was laid undressed on a crimson satin cushion. The Empress of Austria, who was the principal godmother, looked magnificent in a cream colour satin dress, with train of the same colour, on which were raised velvet flowers of grosoile colour.

A very stylish wedding was that of Mr. Lionel Richard Cavendish Boyle and Miss Alice Fulteney, solemnised at St. Peter's, Eaton-square, on September 4. The bride was attired in a rich white ottoman silk, trimmed with cascades of pearls, and wore a tulle veil, fastened with a diamond star, the gift of her sisters, and two diamond brooches. Her other ornaments were a diamond and emerald pendant, the gift of her mother, and a bracelet, the gift of the bridegroom. The bridesmaids were dressed in white Indian muslin spotted with gold, the skirts being of white Surab, trimmed with lace and narrow gold braid. They wore gold braided bonnets, trimmed with lace and aigrettes, and lined with dark red velvet. They each wore a gold bangle, and carried bouquets of dark red and pale pink carnations, the gifts of the bridegroom.

The Blair Athole gathering took place recently in the policies in front of the castle, and was unusually well attended, the fine weather bringing the spectators from long distances around. At an early hour picturesque groups were scattered over the hill-side, and crowds had assembled in the field; and at noon a salute of twenty-one guns from the battery at the castle announced the departure of the Duke of Athole and his Highlanders, and of the Duchess and her children and guests, for the ground. The Highlanders formed a cordon round the enclosure where the games and sports were held. The reel and sword dancing to the strains of the Duke's pipers was very good by children and men, and took place on a raised platform in front of the marquee, where the Duchess and the ladies sat as judges. In addition to the usual games, which were all well contested, there was a show of industry contributed by the wives and sisters of Highlanders, in the way of plain and fancy knitted hose, spun tartan, &c.

STATISTICS.

There are now in England and Wales between 300,000 and 400,000 women who possess the franchise—that is, one woman to every seven men. More than 108,000 women possess, as householders, the municipal franchise. The number of women landowners in England and Wales is 37,806.

The Salvation Army will shortly celebrate its eighteenth anniversary. As compared with last year, its strength at home is 591 corps and 1,439 officers, against 320 corps and 711 officers in 1882. Abroad the progress has been equally satisfactory, most of all in our Australian colonies, where three or four corps, established last year in South Australia, have increased to 24 corps, with 40 officers. A new order of "sergeants" has been created for "outpost duty," *i.e.*, for leading small detachments from five to ten miles into the country on Sundays, and occupying isolated villages, which in almost every case soon form self-supporting corps. "Their bands," it is added, "are listened to, by the common people at least, with attention and pleasure." Miss Booth has issued a number of circular invitations to a great Salvationist gathering on the Swiss frontier.

GEMS.

It is the lot of genius to be opposed, and to be invigorated by opposition.

It is human nature to love to make experiments at the expense of others.

Mean souls, like poor pictures, are often found in good-looking frames.

Job was as miserable in his sufferings as happy in his patience.

It is a crime to consider any wickedness a sign of ability.

He who often swears distrusts his own words.

Let us not be ever driving on. The machinery, physical and mental, will not stand it.

HOUSEHOLD TREASURES.

Genoese Pastry.—Take a quarter of a pound of fresh butter, put it into a bowl, and warm it until it can be beaten with a spoon; add four ounces of powdered loaf sugar, and beat the two together until a smooth white cream is obtained; then add one egg, and keep on beating the mixture till it is smooth again, then add three more eggs in the same manner. Lastly, incorporate quickly with the mixture a quarter of a pound of the finest flour, and as soon as it is smooth pour it out to the thickness of half an inch on a buttered tin, and put this into the oven at once. When done (in about ten or fifteen minutes) turn out the slab of Genoese and put it to cool, under side uppermost, on a sieve. When cold, spread a very thin layer of apricot jam over the top of the slab.

Oyster Kromeskys.—Parboil a dozen oysters in their own liquor, remove their beards, strain the liquor, and cut up the oysters into small dice; melt a piece of butter in a saucepan, stir in a pinch of flour, add the oyster liquor and the minced oysters, salt and pepper to taste, a little grated nutmeg, and a pinch or two of chopped parsley; take the saucepan off the fire, and stir in the yolk of one egg with the juice of half a lemon. When the mixture is quite cold, divide it into twelve portions, cut some slices of parboiled fat bacon as thin as possible to the size of 1¼in. by 2½in., wrap each portion tightly in a piece of bacon. When they are all done, dip them in batter, and fry them in plenty of hot lard to a light brown colour. Drain well from fat in front of the fire, and serve with fried parsley.

MISCELLANEOUS.

The warm days in spring bring forth passion-flowers and forget-me-nots. It is only after midsummer, when the days grow shorter and hotter, that fruit begins to appear.

The Ideal and the Real.—What a great thing it would be for the man with the small appetite if he could only taste the perfume of the cooking. Walking in the neighbourhood of an oyster shop, for instance, he scents afar the odour of the frying oyster. It is dainty, piquant, aromatic. He enters, and when he commences to eat his ordered "fry" he finds it is in tangibility a much different thing than it was when its odours were floating in the air. Again, the man with the small appetite may be strolling past a German restaurant. He sniffs the odour of fried onions, and has an appetite at once. Then he orders beefsteak and onions, but he cannot eat them. The reality is so different from the ideal. Soyer, the great French cook, used to make eatable things for the soldiers of the French army and amassed a fortune. The cook who will make edibles taste as they smell in cooking has unlimited millions before him.

Uncultivated.—Uncultivated people are pretty apt to generate family feuds, and keep them up for their neighbours to gossip about; but it is uncultivated parentage that produces such a sad result. If the mother and father are cultivated and refined, the child will grow up so too, because he patterns after them. I am aware that this is a very unwelcome doctrine to very many, especially so to those whose children have not developed as they should. But it is a truth which, acknowledged, will enable such parents to have more kindly feelings and more forgiving hearts towards the erring ones. It is a truth which all young parents should thoughtfully and prayerfully digest. The little child will be your imitator. Do you speak the Anglo-Saxon? He will soon learn to lisp mamma. Do you smile, and have a pleasant, cheerful countenance? He will too, and *vice versâ*. Do you scold him and the other children on every trifling occasion? He will think it manly to frown and scold and storm when little things trouble him. Are you calm in judgment, composed in manner, gentle of touch, sweet in tones of voice? I assure you he will be so too. Do you love the children and manifest great interest in their welfare? They will love and take an interest in one another now, while I am sure they will do so in after years, when they have tasted some of the sorrows of life.

How Flies Climb.—Some very interesting facts were recently contributed to the Berlin Society of Natural History by Herr H. Dewitz, which go far to prove that the feet of flies cannot possess the sucking properties ascribed to them, for they are hard and destitute of muscles. A long time ago Blackwell contradicted this theory, and maintained that the power of adherence was due to a sticky matter secreted from the foot-hairs of the fly. This theory was pronounced not proven. Dewitz after careful experiments, shows that Blackwell was right. He watched the exudation of the sticky matter from the feet of the fly, by fastening one to the under side of a piece of glass, and examining it through a microscope. A perfectly clear liquid was seen to flow from the ends of the foot-hairs, and to attach the foot to the glass. When the foot was lifted up to be put down in another place, the drops of sticky matter were left on the glass exactly on the spot where the foothairs rested. Leydig discovered certain glands in the folds of the foot in 1850, and from them the adhesive fluid appears to flow down through the hollow of the hair. A similar adhesive fluid appears to be possessed by many larvæ, and probably by all insects which climb the under sides of leaves of trees and plants.

NOTICES TO CORRESPONDENTS.

R. Williams.—Regretfully declined.

G. V. P.—The 21st of December, 1843, came on Thursday.

Belle and Lilie.—We never insert matrimonial advertisements.

Laura.—The third finger of the right hand is the engagement ring finger.

Z. Y. X.—Yellow soap is preferable, but the other would not do any harm.

R. R. R.—A pawnbroker may make a special contract for any pledge above the value of forty shillings.

A. L. T.—The bridesmaid's duty is to wait on the bride, to hold her glove and bouquet during the marriage ceremony.

Constant Reader.—The tenant is liable to double rent. The landlord should issue a writ of ejectment at once. Consult a solicitor.

R. M. D.—1. Wait till you are a little older. 2. Gladys is the Welsh form of Claudia, the feminine of Claudius, a Roman name.

Cosina.—Eating slate pencils is very injurious, and, if long continued, liable to ruin your health and appearance. Stop the practice at once.

Ivy.—We know of no meaning attached to a parcel of pounded wild birds' egg shells being sent to a lady. Perhaps some of our readers can oblige you.

J. R. D.—You had better consult a respectable solicitor. We do not like to give an opinion on questions of law or fact which may not be absolutely reliable.

R. S. P.—The lady should give up her revengeful project. It will render her no happier, and probably still further injure her good name.

B. J. M.—Standard gold consists of 22 parts fine gold to 2 of alloy, but there are four other standards for jewellery, having 18, 15, 12, and 9 parts of pure gold in 24.

C. M. F.—A lady should never allow a gentleman to keep her in the attitude of waiting if there seems to be no reason why the marriage should be postponed.

F. R. G.—1. If the introduction is quite a ceremonious one, to bow is sufficient, but if it is one where you are desirous of knowing and becoming intimate, shake hands at once. 2. Handwriting excellent.

Bessie S.—If you are patient, and at the same time saving and industrious, you will finally gain the consent of the young lady's parents. Do not be in haste to marry without their consent.

Jessie.—The battle of Trafalgar took place on the 21st of October, 1805, when Lord Nelson was killed on board the *Victory*. The famous battle of Agincourt was fought on the 25th of the same month in 1415.

Baby B.—Why not ask the young lady herself? That is the best way to find out. Probably she intended that you should call her by her Christian name when you were associating in your homes.

Elvina.—It would not be improper at a social gathering for the gentleman to request the pleasure of a dance; but it is always wise to be reserved with a lady who manifests no desire for your acquaintance.

Morris.—The young man is a trifler, and cares very little for either of you. It would be a good plan for you to confront him with evidences of his deceit and perfidious behaviour.

C. R. F.—You had better make up your mind at once, and accept one of these admirers. We cannot decide for you. Probably the farmer will prove as devoted a husband as the other. He is a loyal lover.

W. S. D.—There would be nothing improper or unusual in presenting the young lady with a second ring. We presume that you are engaged to be married to her. If not, you had better propose at once.

R. S. B.—The word Yankee is believed to have been derived from the manner in which the Indians endeavoured to pronounce the word English, which they rendered *Yenghees* or *Younghees*—hence the word Yankee.

Carola D.—To stain cherry in imitation of old mahogany, digest logwood chips in vinegar or acetic acid for twenty-four hours or more. When ready to use, heat the solution, then dip the wood until the suitable colour is obtained.

L. V. D.—The boy or man is expected to open the conversation. Young ladies are privileged to bow first when in the street. To boys and girls no very stringent rules of etiquette apply. They are expected to be civil and modest in their manners.

W. R. F.—The inventor of gas illuminating purposes was William Murdock, and it was while employed at Watts's Soho Works, Birmingham, that he brought it into practical use. This was in 1802 at the illuminations in honour of the peace of Amiens.

W. G. T.—It would be quite correct to give a present after having received several. A cigar-case, a worked tobacco-pouch, a nice purse with the gentleman's initials stamped in gold on it, a pair of worked slippers, would all or any of them be suitable and useful presents.

S. T. P.—The members of a metropolitan vestry are elected by the ratepayers, and of a district board by the members of each vestry comprised within that district. The size of a vestry is in proportion to the population, and its members retire every three years.

May S.—If the two understand each other, and the reason for waiting is lack of fortune, it is all very well that the engagement should be a long one, but if there is no such reason, and the gentleman does not press for the wedding, the lady owes it to herself not to be too patient.

Carrie.—Our advice to you is to break off this flirtation at once. You are acting very imprudently. The young man treats you with entire disrespect, and shows that he is not a suitor. No self-respecting young lady should permit herself to be treated in this manner for a moment.

Barbara.—Break off the clandestine correspondence at once and act in an open and manly way, and not like a sneak. When you are a couple of years older you will see the foolishness of your present boyish infatuation. You need not give up your hope and desire of one day making the young lady your bride.

R. C. N.—The bride takes her place at the left of the bridegroom. She removes the glove from her right hand, and the bridegroom also removes the glove from his right hand. The bride gives her glove to her first bridemaid to hold, and sometimes to keep as a good omen. The ceremony then begins.

BLACKBIRDS.

Oh, blackbirds, pray twitter your deep delight,
As you hop through the tender grasses,
To bask in the rays of the sun's soft light,
And sing to my love as she passes.

She told me your musical chatter was sweet
One day, in the sunlit meadow,
When low on the mosses I sat at her feet,
In the birch-tree's swaying shadow.

"The song of the robin is welcome as May,
And the linnet's note is thrilling;
But the blackbird's chatter and twittering gay,
The meadow and woodland filling.

"Is dearer to me than the rapturous lay
Of linnet or thrush," and her glancing
Was tender and soft; and my love, that day,
Like wine through my veins was dancing.

I whispered my love, and she answered "yes,"
When—straight as a sound could follow—
The musical twitters, now more, now less,
Of blackbirds came up from the hollow.

She smiled, and I murmured: "The winds shall bring
The sound of the blackbird's singing,
The day you are mine!" Gay birds, oh! sing,
For our wedding-bells are ringing!

And soon through the lane she will come, my own!
As she steps through the nodding grasses,
Oh, sing her a song! She will hear your tone
And smile, as she coyly passes!

M.

M. D.—Foreign languages can be acquired without a teacher, but if you have the means to employ one do so. A knowledge of Latin is almost indispensable to a lawyer. Proficiency in the French and German languages would be of service to you in any calling.

Amina.—We advise you not to count upon your old beau. If he had any idea of marrying you he would have written regularly to you, and you would now be in no doubt of his intentions. About the second gentleman we scarcely know what to say. Wait till he has proposed, then hurry on the wedding.

Dora F. C. C.—1. Charlotte is the feminine of Charles, meaning strong; Louisa, the feminine of Louis, the defender of the people. 5. If it arises from the stomach being slightly out of order a little carbonate of soda is a sure cure. 3. January 7th, 1870, fell on Friday, and April 23rd, 1868, on Thursday. 4. Fair writing, but not very neat.

C. R. S.—Do not be too much discouraged, but go right ahead in your business and put by money. If you are successful, you may find your suit more acceptable. Probably your circumstances are not sufficiently promising to satisfy the young lady's parents that you can take good care of their daughter. At any rate, you must look at things from the point of view of good sense and prudence.

Bessie F.—The custom of a bridegroom being attended on his marriage by a friend or relative who is styled the "best man," so practised at weddings in the present day, is of great antiquity, descending from our Saxon ancestors. In their time marriages were always celebrated in the house of a bridegroom. On the day before the wedding all his friends and relations having been invited, arrived at his house and spent the time in feasting and in preparing for the approaching ceremony. Next came the bridegroom's company mounted on horseback, completely armed, who proceeded in great state and order, under the command of one who was called the forewistaman or foremost man, to receive and conduct the bride in safety to the house of her future husband. The bride, in her turn, was attended by her guardian and other male relatives, led by a matron, who was called the bride's woman and followed by a company of young maidens, who were called bridesmaids. The Saxon forewistaman of the ninth century is the prototype of the English "best man" of the nineteenth.

Lou-lou.—1. Because your circulation is weak. 2. The 12th of June, 1850, fell on a Wednesday. 3. Paint with tincture of iodine, and wear very easy shoes. 4. If nature has not blessed you with a very clear complexion art will not produce one. Live temperately, avoid causes of excitement and worry, and be in the open air as much as you can. There is nothing like vigorous exercise to quicken the circulation and clear the skin.

Dick.—As to protection from the cold, if the whisky could be continuously administered without producing intoxication, its effect would be more certain in retaining the vital heat than any which could be produced by coffee. But the latter, if taken hot, would have the advantage in the contest because it would not lead to inebriety. Neither coffee in solution nor whisky contains any appreciable nutritive qualities.

S. W.—To make gutta-percha cement for fastening leather, dissolve a quantity of gutta-percha in chloroform—enough to make a fluid of honey-like consistence. When spread it will dry in a few minutes. Heat the surfaces at a fire or gas flame until softened, and apply them together. Small patches of leather can be thus cemented on boots, &c., so as almost to defy detection. Shoemakers employ this cement with great success.

C. F. W.—A man may be a great lawyer and not be a great orator. Fair speaking abilities will enable you to reach the first rank at the bar, if you are possessed of the requisite mental capacity, and other qualifications. Men should not be judged by the size of their heads. One man may have a large head, but an inactive brain; another man may have a small head, but an active brain, and the latter may outstrip the former in every pursuit.

Anxious Mother.—Let your girl go into the kitchen. Most girls, almost from babyhood, if permitted to be with their mothers in the kitchen, love to see the work done, particularly the cooking; and nothing delights them more than to be allowed to attempt to make some simple article themselves. This early play will not be forgotten. Girls that grow up under such training or indulgence will have no fear of the real care when it comes to them as a duty.

An Old Sub.—1. Boil a handful of figleaves, to be obtained from any herbalist, in two quarts of water till it is reduced to one pint, squeeze the leaves and bottle the liquor for use. When required sponge the silk with the preparation. 2. Probably it arises from a disordered stomach. Live very temperately, take some alterative medicine, and every morning rinse the mouth with a teaspoonful of the concentrated solution of chloride of soda in a tumbler of water, and drink a wineglassful of water in which ten drops of it have been put.

B. W. S.—Do not repine because you are not a heaven-born genius. The endowments of nature we cannot command, but we can cultivate those given. "My experience," remarked Sir Fowell Buxton, "is that men of great talents are apt to do nothing for want of vigour. Vigour, energy, resolution, firmness of purpose—these carry the day. Is there one whom difficulties dishearten, who bends to the storm? He will do little. Is there one who will conquer? That kind of man never fails. Let it be your first study to teach the world that you are not wood and straw—that you have some iron in you. Let men know that what men say you will do, that your decision made is final—no wavering; that, once resolved, you are not to be allured or intimidated."

M. D. J.—Yes; flowers can be coloured by absorption. At a late social entertainment the Princess of Wales is said to have carried a bouquet of large lilies tinted with delicate pink and blue, by the absorption of dyes through the stems. The dyes do not in the least affect the perfume or freshness of the flowers. The process is the discovery of Mr. Nesbit. It is said flowers refuse to absorb certain colours. Some of the lilies which had been treated with a purple dye separated the red and the blue, the colours being divided in the process of absorption.

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